

ASSIMILATING THE LIBERIAN COMMUNITY
AT FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF BRISTOL PENNSYLVANIA

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ABSTRACT

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The context for this doctoral project is First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania. The purpose of this project is to assimilate members of the minority Liberian community into the worship of the church. The hypothesis is that if the minority Liberian Community is assimilated and welcomed to become one into the church with the Caucasian Community, the Liberian Community will grow. Qualitative analysis using interviews, pre and post surveys and questionnaires was used to measure the hypothesis. The research revealed an increased communication and awareness between both communities.

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sacrifices from my family, my education would not have been possible. Thanks also to the Almighty God for allowing me to reach this far in the project.

DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife, Tammay Queta Dolo, my love will never end for you. To our beautiful daughter Leah Diamon Dolo, I am very proud of you all that I am your prayer warrior. I pray God's blessing Ephesians 1: 17-20 (NKJV) over you all and my grandchildren that God will continue to shower you all with His blessing and that you all will be rooted and grounded in His love.

INTRODUCTION

The church is clearly defined not as the actual building itself, but as a group of believers. Thus, as its core value the church is each individual Christian. When new people join the church, it is the responsibility of the church or current members to embrace and welcome the new members by assimilating them into the life and culture of the church. This is best done through a new member assimilation process. New member assimilation is thus a vital part of the great commission as Jesus said, “to go and make all people to be his followers paraphrase.” New member assimilation is one of the most important tasks of the church as it relates to the Great Commission, (Matt. 28:16-20).

The new member’s assimilation process is also one that should guide and ease the new member into his or her church family and further embrace, equip and empower him/her to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Despite being such an important part of the church life, new member assimilation often fails to meet the needs of new members. The process needs to be evaluated periodically for effectiveness. When new comers are not properly assimilated, they are not likely to become engaged and active in the life and the on-going ministries of the church. They might even leave the church and not follow their faith at all.

In my role of assisting pastor at First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania, it became clear to me that the church was struggling to grow, especially with members of the Liberian Community. As an assisting pastor and pastor of

Evangelism, outreach to the Liberian Community, I became concerned about the lack of growth in the minority Liberian Community in the local church. At that time, there were about thirty and more members of the Liberian Community worshipping with the Caucasians. There are more Liberians living in the Bristol area, around 1,000, but most of them are not in First Church. Being that this was the beginning of the assimilation process, we were serious about encouraging the Liberians to participate in the worship of the church. It was clearly seen that the thirty Liberians were encouraged to participate in the life and ministry of the church, but this did not work well. The Liberians told me that they were not truly welcomed into the church. This simply proved to the minority Liberian Community that being that they were not truly welcome into the church, it caused a decline. This caused some of the Liberian Community members to stop attending First United Methodist Church of Bristol.

This project examined an existing process to encourage new member's assimilation into First United Methodist Church of Bristol. It hoped to improve its effectiveness with the goal to create more unity and bring both the minority Liberian Community and Caucasians together as one body in Christ. The unity will also create a growing and better blended worship service to First United Methodist Church of Bristol. The end goal will also enhance new member's assimilation process, to ensure that the minority Liberian Community members are properly assimilated into the church. The result will also break the gap between the original Caucasians and the minority Liberian Community members, to bring growth on both sides of the church. The goal will also lead to spiritual growth for First United Methodist Church. Spiritual growth will also create cultural education and practices to both the Caucasians and the Liberian

Community. Although this project was designed for First United Methodist Church of Bristol, Pennsylvania, this new member assimilation process can also be useful to other churches for church growth.

Chapter one of this project explains the spiritual journey of the researcher and his call to ministry. Additionally, this chapter described in detail the context for the project, First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania. This chapter addresses the connection between my spiritual formation, the context for the project and my passion for wanting to research on the topic of assimilation. Chapter two, Biblical Foundations discusses the way in which Moses received his call from God to go and deliver the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. This assimilation is also related to the commissioning of Jesus in the New Testament Scripture of (Matt. 28:16-20).

Exodus 3:6-12, discusses the relationship between the Israelites and God and the mission of Moses to go and deliver and assimilate them into their new home, the Promised Land. Additionally, (Matthew 28: 16-20), focusses on how members and new members are to be assimilated into the church as the Lord Jesus mandated before His departure. In both the Old and New Testament Scriptures, new members were to be incorporated into the worshipping community after being embraced, equipped, and empowered by those who welcomed them with agape love and kindness.

Chapter three explained the history of new member assimilation mostly through the lens of the Methodist denomination, John Wesley and others. It further explores the life and history of John Wesley, the father of what is known today as “Methodism.” John Wesley created a method of assimilating new Christians and the poor by organizing them into small groups. These groups were known as “societies, cells, groups, clubs,” and had

an emphasis on “Holy Living.” The creation of these groups formed not only a movement, but also became a denomination. Some of the Historians mentioned here are Kenneth C. Kinghorn who wrote about John Wesley and Methodism and Kelvin M. Watson who also wrote about Wesley’s general rules and guide for Christian living.

Chapter four covers the Theological Foundations. It shows how theologians such as Roger L. Walton, Avery T. Willis, Greg Ogden and others, their understanding of God in their times, and how God used them to help transform others life into the community of faith. This chapter also looks at Jerry Wiles, Randy Newman, and Tim Wright and how God used them to assimilate new members into the body of Christ. It is in this chapter that you learn how those theologians helped to shape my understanding of new member’s assimilation and the influences these theologians had on this process. They further gave me a framework for understanding how God desires for us as Christians to welcome and love new members into our Christian communities.

Chapter five the Theoretical Foundations, examines the research of those who previously completed research and have studied the integration and assimilation of the Liberian people into the United States. It further mentioned how the Liberian people are orientated into their new home in the United States. Additionally, this chapter looks at various new members’ assimilation process and discusses various techniques and methods of addressing the problem of members not being properly assimilated into the life and ministries of the church.

Chapter six, project analysis discusses the fieldwork and the implementation of the project. It also includes the detail review of the steps taken to gather and analyze data. The project analysis further discusses survey and gathering results, participant

responses and comments to answers interview questions. Included are the timeline and outcomes of the research process and step-by-step details of the implementation of the project. Additionally, a critical reflection of the complete journey is presented, and the summary and conclusions are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The synergy chapter of this project was developed to identify a ministry objective and interest according to the context. In order to determine a relationship between ministry interests and skills, it is important to identify needs of the context based on the Doctor of Ministry Project. This project focus on the identification of the study and goal mentioned as Bible studies and meal gathering and more. It also mentions some of the life experiences both good times and difficult times of the researcher. The synergy papers also collect pieces of information as it relates to the spiritual autobiography of the researcher and the context of ministry. Additionally, it includes a brief history of the congregation, its mission and the vision statement are included. Some of the main reasons for this project were to determine whether the congregation is meeting the spiritual, educational and physical needs of the people in the community, especially the minority Liberian Community. Ministering to meet the needs of the least or poor in the community is among the goals of the Christian Church. The history of the city of Bristol includes some of the history of other denominations in the Bristol area, and some educational history of the borough of the city of Bristol Pennsylvania.

While focusing on the assimilation of the Liberian Community into the church, we also mentioned some of the various groups that meets regularly in the church building. Whether all participants are members or part of the worshipping congregation of First Church. Some of the groups or ministries to be included are food pantry, alcohol

and addiction recovery group, various African prayer ministries and congregations. The lack of the congregation's growth in the ethnic diversity community is also a question in this project. The proposed project title is, "Assimilating the Liberian Community member At First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania." The problem is that First United Methodist Church of Bristol has not been welcoming the minority Liberian Community members into the church. There is a disconnection, and some of the Liberian members have left the church and the remaining are not growing in their faith. It is important to mention that this ministry project will be very interesting in relationship to the needs of the context and the congregation based on the proposed project topic to help grow the church.

Bristol is a multi- cultural-community with many churches and denominations. The ministry interest and skills will best relate to the context because its responsibilities will provide an opportunity to meet and minister to people from the Liberia Community. It is interesting to note that the congregation at First United Methodist Church is a majority Caucasian congregation and many Liberians in this area are trying to connect to The United Methodist Church. The mission of assimilation best related to the project to help bring grow the Liberian Community into the church. The history of the city of Bristol and the history of First United Methodist Church both are included in the project. It is impressive to note that the relationship between ministry interest and skills and the needs within the context form a basis for the project. The question therefore arises: How can we encourage the minority Liberian Community be assimilated into First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania. When considering diversity, the questions to be addressed are, what is the common ground or what will unite these groups in to one people? The second question would be; What needs of the community of Bristol should

the congregation focus on or take into consideration? These and many other questions and answers will form part of our ministry's project.

As Christians from various denominations, we are seeking one goal of preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. In Bristol there are many people that are not involved or do not attend any religious services. There are Pentecostal churches and others main line denominations such as, Roman Catholic, Assembly of God, Episcopal and The United Methodist Church to name a few. Our congregation at FUMC is not growing. Are we fighting to win the world by inviting more people to Christ? Is there any competition among us how we might grow as a congregation in a diverse community? Do we as a Methodist congregation among many denominations invite, welcome and accept our visitors as they visit the various ministries of the church? It is different case to invite people and to truly accept them in the congregation especially where there are many congregations in the community.

The problem within the congregation is that First United Methodist Church is not truly welcoming the Liberian Community into the church. The congregation will grow by including people from the Liberian Community as part of the worshipping congregation. The church has a weekly food pantry to help feed approximately 100 families and other ministries that take place in the building seven days a week. As a researcher, I realized that very few of the community people that come to our food pantry, alcohol and support groups are part of the congregation. There are some other prayer groups that meets in the building during the week even on Sunday after our worship services. None of these groups are involved in the congregation, and that is of major concern. If the church meets the physical needs can we meet their spiritual needs as well? As one of the oldest

congregations in Bristol according to our history should we invite everyone including the homeless people around Silver Lake and other places to be part of our congregation?

It is unacceptable to see that the church that provides food for more than a hundred families on a weekly basis has only forty to fifty persons in Sunday morning worship. It appears that something is wrong with that big picture, perhaps there is an underlining cause or reason for that. As a researcher, I continued to ask, are we truly following and fulfilling our vision and mission statement of the church? Our vision statement says: Our congregation is a spiritual home where people can find God's grace and healing. This is followed by the mission statement, "To offer hope and unconditional love of Christ to all people, and to support people in growing as disciples, practicing love and forgiveness and using their gifts in service to Christ in our local community and the World." These statements sound very important in the community of ethnic diversity and if truly followed or implemented must lead to the growth of the congregation.

Integration and reaching out to everyone to meet them where they are and to offer them hope and unconditional love to even the least in the local community is pointing to growth of the congregation. Forgiving people and allowing them to practice their gifts will surely lead to the tremendous growth of any congregation.

Contextual Analysis

The context review clearly examined that Bristol First United Methodist Church is one of the oldest congregations established in 1788. Since the founding of the church, there have been 157 ministers have been assigned to the church on an itinerary basis. It has been recorded in the history of the church that the founding father of The United

Methodist Church, John Wesley had earlier recommended that a minister serves a church for only one year. According to the historian, that might be the reason for so many ministers.

One of the main points of concern is that as one of the oldest congregations in Bristol, over two hundred and twenty-seven years, continues to diminish instead of growing. Attendance is usually between forty-three to fifty persons, unless on a special occasion such as Christmas Eve, Easter, or other Christians holidays of the year. Even though there are several ministries sharing the church, there is no growth in membership. In the community of multi-culture and ethnic diversity, where various ethnic festivals are held during the year including weekly concerts, it could be a growing congregation in the community. The location of the city show that Bristol has an entrance to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and U.S Route Thirteen passes through the city and presently on bus route coming out of Philadelphia connecting the town with the city of Philadelphia and suburban areas. Bristol with its population of over 9,633 people of ethnic diversity, seemed an interesting area for church growth and developments. The city is a beautiful location for transportation both water and land because boats usually travel on the Delaware River next to the Bristol Borough.

Educational and Professional Development

It was an excitement that I completed the Master of Divinity degree at United Theological Seminary in May 2008. Although I felt this was not enough for my call to ministry. Upon graduation, I was not successful to receive a pastoral appointment with

the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference, but I realized that could not stop me from continuing my ministry study. Realizing my own faith that prayer changes things, I continued to pray over the decision to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry program and I felt to enroll. In May 2015 it had been seven years since I graduated with the Master of Divinity degree and it is disappointing that I had not received a part-time pastoral appointment in the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Coming from a poor family background and being self-supporting throughout my education, I have had some thought time during my ministry journey. In my spiritual autobiography, I mentioned how in Liberia I suffered sometime during my junior and senior high school years. I used to walk almost five miles every morning and afternoon to the bus stop and from school. I also remembered how I used to spend the whole day cupping water because there was no food at home. I was more interested in continuing my education to serve God. I also realize how my God saved me in Liberia through the civil war. I believe God brought me to the United States with blessings that I might have these educational opportunities. Coming from a rural district of The United Methodist Church in Liberia, not many people on a higher level in the church know me well enough to recommend me for appointment. In all of that, I realize that not many people from my district had the opportunity to get a high school or college education.

However, after some intensive prayer prior to my interview to seek a visa at the United States Embassy in Monrovia, the question I answered the counselor was I would continue my theological education to serve Christ's Church. Prior to travelling to the United States, I was serving in The United Methodist Church in Liberia. I later attended seminary at the Gbarnga school of theology for my Bachelor of Science in Theology. my.

I also served as Lay Speaker, secretary of the men's fellowship of our district, and as secretary of my local charge. Prior to this, I served as a pastor over three preaching points. I continued to strive for education to the level of the doctoral program, I know it is a blessing from God and I am thankful to God for the opportunity. I am grateful to God because if it had not been God's blessing and saving power, I would not have made it this far in my education or ministry journey.

I am thankful to God for affording me the opportunity to come to the United States where God is blessing me and encouraging me to continue my education in ministry. In my own life experience, not everything in a person's may be hundred percent successful. I recall when my uncle Rev. Johnson Yarkpawolo, an elder in The United Methodist Church encouraged me to take part as a drummer, it was the beginning of my journey. It was from that point forward that I was able to continue my service in the United Methodist Church even in my misfortune. Both my father and mother were uneducated. My mother, Gborlormeh Dolo, even though she was not educated, encouraged me from the time I graduated from high school to go in to ministry. It was with my parents' encouragement that I was able to start this journey to join The United Methodist Church, even though it took some years before I was able to attend seminary.

It is interesting that the very preaching point in Dement where I earlier joined the church as a drummer is the very church that I was first appointed to serve as a licensed local pastor after many years. It was from that point that I continued to be encouraged to serve. I went to seminary at the Gbarnga School of Theology. Another important experience is that the preaching point where I received my first appointment is my mother's hometown. During this journey of ministry, it is interesting to remember some

of these important events and to be grateful to God who continues to carry me through. It is important to remember that after serving my first preaching point for five years from 1990 to 1994, I received a recommendation from my local charge to go to seminary for my Bachelor of Science in Theology (BTh).

It was from that point in time that I decided to develop my educational goal for the work of ministry. In our tradition, there is a saying of the older people have a wise saying that, “before a child start to walk, he or she will take the first step one at a time, or by holding on something.” “And a journey of a thousand miles, begins with a single step.” The child must fall several times or struggle before he or she will be able to walk. I mention this because my first experience in theological education began in 1996 at the Gbarnga School of Theological in Liberia and today this journey continues with the Doctor of Ministry program, despite my misfortune of not being able to receive a pastoral appointment.

My name was among those selected randomly, among many names for the diversity program to come to the United States on an immigrant visa. It is further clear, that millions of people apply every year for the diversity program and not all applicants are successful through the processing to come to the United States. I give glory to God and appreciation to my sister, Lorpu Suah, who was able to send me an affidavit of support, to sponsor my program by sending all required documents for my travel to the United States. Through her effort, God was able to bring me to this wonderful land of opportunity to continue my education at the doctoral level. It is not easy for someone coming from a third world country especially my parents did not have the opportunity to travel to the United States or the opportunity for such an education.

My parents were unable to support my schooling, but I was able to struggle for myself through the blessing of God to graduate from high School. I know that my call to ministry means that God has a plan for my life. I believe this is the reason God continued to carry me through the many obstacles that I faced. I know that the word of our Lord Jesus did not leave me hopeless, because Jesus said, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age," (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). If the Lord Jesus promised to be with me, I am sure that amid the storm, He will provide and save me.

My focus now is on proving leadership in such an ethnic diverse community. It is a challenge to undertake such a project especially coming from a different cultural background. It is also a blessing that this project will be a great learning experience for me. Seeking information from the library and from people who lived in such a community or city for over forty years will be part of this project. It is also interesting to realize that many homeless people spend time especially during the summer along the Silver Lake Park and other places in Bristol. These people are part of the multi-cultural or ethnic diversity community in Bristol. In this project, it is the responsibilities of the oldest church in the community to encourage everyone by organizing a program for people to get involved in expanding the ethnic diversity of the congregation. It is important to consider the various ministries at our food pantry drug and alcohol addiction and recovery program. All the people taking part in these ministries should be encouraged to become part of the worshipping congregation.

The city of Bristol has more than twelve houses of worship currently including my context. There are also several Muslim Mosques and Jewish Synagogues. Bristol is part of the area that included Levittown, Bristol Township, Langhorne and Croydon. In

all these connected cities, there are populations in addition to the 9,633 residing in the city limit of Bristol. It is important to note that there is more than one library in the Bristol and Levittown area. There is a public library in Bristol Township, near Bristol and the Grundy library in Bristol city and both of those libraries will provide resource material for this research project. Reflecting on the history of Bristol, it is through the preaching of Captain Thomas Webb, a group of people was encouraged to start the first Methodist congregation in Bristol.

A group of eleven people organized a class, which met in the Court House. The class organized a prayer group and class meeting in private homes. Accordingly, as the group grew, they decided to build a church building for worship. The group later purchased land near the tree on Wood Street in Bristol, where Captain Webb had first preached in Bristol. Mary Connor, a member of the class of eleven people, had permission to solicit funds for the building of the first church. In 1803, when the time came to pay for the building materials, they found that the treasurer had spent the money. Miss Connor's persistent prayer and leadership skills encouraged her to start again. Her motto was, "Trust in the Lord." Therefore, trusting in the Lord with good leadership skills, Mary Connor again raised the funds for the building of the church.

It is wonderful to see the women in the Christian Church to promote good leadership skills with the effort to grow the word of God even in the misfortune and disappointment. Due to Mary Connor's persistent efforts to establish the word of God in Bristol, she is known as, "Mother of Bristol Methodism." It is interesting to remember that we are coming from many years back and how church growth and development is a slow progress. It might take a longer time depending on the people residing in the

community based on their cultural background. We often hear from an old saying that, “Rome was not built in one day,” it may take a longer time to establish a diverse congregation, but with God in our midst it can happen. God’s word never fails, so the establishment may be slow, but certainly it will grow depending on the leadership or the leaders’ effort. The congregation established by Mary Connor continued to grow until the original building became small in 1845.

Continuing with more efforts for the growth of the church, the original building was broken down and a new church was built on the same site the new building had two stories; however, as more people continued to be converted, the second church building became too small. In 1894 it was agreed upon to build a larger building around the corner at Mulberry and Cedar Streets. The growth continued and the stone building was dedicated in 1895, as First United Methodist Church of Bristol. An important part of my proposed project during my spiritual journey is that coming from the remote part of Liberia in Africa, I am presently informed with the history of the city of Bristol as well as First United Methodist Church. The building that was built in 1895, is the same building where the congregation of FUMC of Bristol is worshipping. Finding myself to be part of this congregation of Bristol First Church is by the work of God. In my spiritual journey, I sometimes ask myself, how did I get here?

Interestingly from the establishment of the church, over two hundred years ago, 158 ministers have served the church. During this time, the pastors have followed the vision of the church, which states the church is now designated.” to be a Spiritual home where people can find God’s grace and healing.” The mission statement further states, “To offer the hope and unconditional love of Christ to all people, and to support people in

growing as disciples, practicing love and forgiveness and using their gift in service to Christ in our local community and the world.” These Vision and mission statements must be implemented, to welcome everyone to be part of the congregation. Clearly understanding these statements, the congregation at First Church is not living up to this statement. Instead of growing, and assimilating new comers, they continue decline in comparison to other congregations in the area. Other churches that have experienced decline comparable to FUMC in Bristol have closed due to low attendance and not being able to meet their responsibilities.

A conference held in 1788 lead to the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Accordingly, Bristol Circuit was founded by William Dougherty, and he was appointed by the bishop as the first preacher in charge. Dougherty visited Bristol and found many people awakened by the preaching of Captain Thomas Webb and others who had followed him. It is recorded that in 1817, members of the St. James Protestant Church in Bristol organized Union Sunday school. The history says that this Sunday school continued until 1822 when each church started a school of its own. As a result, the Methodist’s Sunday school was organized by Henry Tomlinson, who was the first superintendent for the Sunday school.

Rev. George Whitefield came to America in 1739 and gave new impetus to the religious enthusiasm already prevailing. He crossed the river from Burlington to Bristol, where he preached to approximately four hundred people before returning to Philadelphia. According to Doron Green, “Whitefield was described as, “of middle

stature, slender body, fair complexion, appearance and extremely bashful and modest.”¹

In addition to Rev. Whitfield, there were others that made an impact on the city of Bristol. There was the establishment of other buildings that impacted the development of the city as well. According to Harold and Carol Michener, “the Quaker meeting house in Bristol was establish approximately in 1711 and was located on 680 Radcliff Street in the Bristol Borough on Market and Cedar Street. ‘It is believed to be one of the oldest buildings in the Borough, which is approximately 250 years old.’ ‘It was used as a hospital during the American Revolution.’”²

As it relates to the healthcare in Bristol, it is important to note that Harriman Hospital was opened in 1916 to support the merchant shipyard. It was a thirty-eight-bed facility and was located on Wilson Avenue. It is also said that in 1922, Dr. George Fox purchased the facility, and by 1946 it was known as Bristol General Hospital.

Additional historical details that a speech given in New Town near Bristol Borough is what pressured Abraham Lincoln to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, which symbolically lead to the freeing of slaves. Of course, some of the most noted slaves that the Emancipation Proclamation affected included Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Marcus Garvey respectively. It is said that the Bethlehem AME Church is the oldest deeded black church in Bucks County near Bristol. It was built in 1809 and is in Bristol Borough. Other branches are in Newtown Borough Morrisville, and Langhorne. The first Board of School Directors under the law of 1834

¹ Doron Green, *History of Bristol Pennsylvania*, (Bristol PA: William V. Leech’s Publishing, 1911).

² Harold and Carol Michener, *Images of America*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2000), 51-52.

were elected in March 1835. Joseph Warbler, James Johnson, William S. Perkins, William F. Swift, James Harrison and Gilbert Tomlinson.

For the past eleven years I have been serving as an assistant volunteer pastor without a monthly salary. This is not by choice but, because the Church does not have the money according to reports. It is challenging sometime that I always do ministry of visitation or transportation from my own expenses such as providing gas for my own car. God did repay me in different ways with His abundance of blessings. Matter of fact, my visit with the present district superintendent this past January shortly before our D Min intensive was very interesting. Expressing my interest in a part-time pastoral appointment, I was told by the district superintendent that I must start organizing the Liberians together in the Bristol area to form a congregation. This I considered good, but I must start this from my own pocket, paying my own expenses, because no resources are given to me for such a ministry. I am volunteering my time without salary or even reimbursement for expenses.

It is a good ministry testimony for my present educational and professional development, but to undertake such a ministry from my own expenses is difficult and we need some resources to start. I know that starting a new church is not easy especially in a city where there are more than ten existing congregations. To continue with further information, my ministry skill and interest face a great challenge in a diverse community but with God, all things can be possible. It is important to note that the nature and the context of the propose project will enable me to minister and to survey s for more than ever before in the city of Bristol and will continue to have interview with older residents for information for both oral and writing histories. am expecting that the Grundy Library

in Bristol Borough is being my second home because I will really spend more time searching for more resources.

Interestingly this project will also need more financial resources as well as time. I am foreseeing working and learning skills as challenges. This project will strengthen and equip me in the area of leadership skill because such a project will take a lot of work and time. As this topic is clearly interesting, it is more challenging for some leaders in diverse communities. The project will allow me to have more responsibilities while learning other language or different cultural background. In this Doctor of Ministry project, I will first seek to learn more about myself, my family history, my educational and spiritual journey. Moreover, I will seek to learn about God in my own life and my spiritual journey by accepting the will of God. I also seek to learn more detailed information on my context, the city of Bristol as well as the congregation of First United Methodist Church. This project will also collect more information about the topic and the communities not only in Bristol, but the surrounding cities, as well as educational development. I also seek to learn more about the form of local government, the educational system and other learning center of my context area. This will be a good learning experience.

This project is also designed to demonstrate our ability to conduct a good and original research that contributes to the theory or practice during this important journey. Chapters of this document will provide background to the said topic and a literature review, as well. It will include description of the method or methodology and conclusion. Also, it will include a recommendation for action and a future research project. It is important that the outline will include all topics that are mentioned in this chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed project draws together assimilation in a multi-cultural community for Christ' Church and church growth. The congregation at First United Methodist Church of Bristol is losing members due to many reasons. It has not seen any growth, especially for the past few conference years. The problem is: How will our congregation grow through accepting the ethnic diversity of our community? Even though there are several ministries held at the church almost seven days a week worship is poorly attended. Many people come for other ministries of the church. The church has a food pantry, that serves approximately 100 families a week. also, there are alcohol and drug addiction recovery programs for a large group that meet at the church but, again, none of those people come to worship services.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

There are two passages that had been chosen for this Doctor of Ministry project. The theme is “Assimilating the Liberian Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania.” The Old Testament Scripture is (Exodus 3:6-12). NKJV. ¹

Moreover, He said, “I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.⁷ And the LORD said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their [a]sorrows. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”¹² So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

New Testament

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go [a]therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I

¹ All Scriptures, unless otherwise noted, used within this document are from the New King James Version. (NKJV).

am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”¹Amen. Matthew 28:16-20. NKJV.

In the Old Testament Scripture, we discussed in detail the mission of Moses’s call on the mountain of God while he was tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. The book of Exodus also followed closely the book of Genesis and presents the historical and religious development of the Israelite’s nations in their early and critical stages in Egypt. It is interesting to note how both our Old Testament and the New Testament Scriptures relate to the mission of calling and sending on a mission. It is understood that Moses is the first prophet called by God in the Exodus story to go and liberate the Israelite from bondage. Also, in the New Testament Jesus’ mission is clearly defined in Luke 4:18-19, to be the new liberator for His people. In this light, it clear that the call and the empowerment of Moses to go on the mission in Exodus is the strength of the book of Exodus. We will discuss in both Old and New Testaments commentaries how each writer interprets the liberation story in Exodus 3:6-12, and the mission of the church as Jesus commissioned His disciples in the final chapter of Matthew 28: 16 20. According to Osborn and Hatton, “the book of Exodus has been called, the Gospel of the Old Testament, “for it records God’s grace as well as God’s law; it also tells the good news of how God miraculously delivered the descendants of Jacob from slavery in Egypt, and set them on a journey to the promise land.”²

God is always involved in the life of God’s people whenever they cry to God. The mission for the church is that God’s word is to reach all people in every community in every nation no matter what culture and what language. As Moses was called the first

² Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus* (New York, NY: United Bible Series, 1999), 1.

prophet in the Old Testament, it means that God will send His messengers everywhere on a mission to liberate God's people from their suffering. The various commentaries indicate the different writers and theologians interpret the Old Testament scriptures found in Exodus. Also, in the rest of the Exodus stories God is concerned to listen to the cry of the needy or the poor. The book of Exodus means the departure of the Israelite from Egypt to the promise land in fulfillment of God's promise for the descendants of Abraham. The book of Matthew is also the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus' ministry following the preaching and the baptizing of John the Baptist.

These two books, the book of Exodus in the Old Testament and Matthew's gospel in the New Testament are similar in identifying two liberators. Study tells us that these two liberators, Moses and Jesus, were both born at a time when male infants were being killed. Matthew structures the early life of Jesus on the story of Moses. It is interesting that both Moses and Jesus have similar life stories of growing up in Egypt. While Moses escaped from Egypt for safety, Jesus' life was also saved when His parents were told by the Angels of the Lord to take the baby Jesus and flee to Egypt. It is important to note that God is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also the God of yesterday, the God of today, and the God forever.

The importance of the book of Exodus is that the reader will find in detail the departure of the Israelites beginning with the call and the commission of Moses. Exodus also contains the departures of the Israelites from Egypt into the wilderness, until the last chapter which states that "Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him" (Exod. 40:16).

As David B. Napier states in his commentary, “Moses was given to play the role of human creator, sustainer, and redeemer, to be sure, as always employing that which God had himself provided in purpose and power.”³ This statement implies that Moses was serving in place of God, who is the creator to redeem and sustain his people, because Moses conceived the power and instructions from God to accomplish the mission.

It is understood in this project that the mission call to Moses in Exodus the third chapter is the beginning of God fulfilling His covenant with Abraham stated in (Genesis 12:1-4). It is clear to note that God did not forget His people, no matter how long their suffering or their terrible condition might last.

Edward R. Dalglish states that “the call and commission of Moses are represented in two different conditions: Chapter 2-4 and 6:7 is mentioned in the two accounts that Yahweh, the God of our father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob appeared twice to Moses.”⁴ Relating to the family line of Moses, we are told that the infancy of Moses and his genealogy is mentioned in Exodus 2:1-10. This study says that Miriam, Aaron and Moses took part during the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and that Aaron and Miriam played an important role in the mission of Moses.

What Did God’s Call Mean to Moses?

According to Peter Chrysologus, states, “this is why God summons Moses by his fatherly voice addressing Moses with parental love and invites him to be the liberator of

³ David B. Napier, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: John Knox Press, 1963), 25.

⁴ Edward R. Dalglish, *The Great Deliverance Studies Supplement Series: Sheffield in the Book of Exodus*, (Nashville, TN Boardman’s Press, 1997), 25.

God's people.”⁵ It is understood especially in the Exodus' story how God declared to Moses and the Israelites that there is no God greater than Jehovah, who alone have the absolute power to deliver. In Exodus the thirty-second chapter, the Israelites forgot about the God who delivered them from Egypt.

They disobeyed God after they received the Ten Commandments and made for themselves “the golden calf” to worship instead of worshipping God. According to Thomas Nelson, he states that “I am who I am; the one who spoke to Moses declared himself to be the eternal one uncaused and independent. Only the creator of all absolute sense, all other creatures are in debt to him for their existence.”⁶ The focus verse in this text is, “So He said, . . . I will certainly be with you,” (Exod. 3:12).

This focus verse and the miraculous appearance of God to Moses in (Exod.3:6-12), are crucial. The first promise of God appearance to Moses in a flame of fire assure Moses of God's absolute power. From this point Moses had the assurance that God was to give him victory to fulfill his mission when he goes to Egypt. Although, the Israelites had suffered in slavery in Egypt for over four hundred years, but God remembered His covenant with the patriarch Abraham. There was reason that God remembered His covenant with the Patriarch Abraham. God further said to Moses, “and this will be the sign to you that is I who have sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain,” (Exod. 3:12). God heard the crying voices of the Israelites in Egypt and commissioned Moses to deliver them to worship God.

⁵ Peter Chrysologous, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity Press 2001), 57.

⁶ Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Student Bible Commentary* Nashville, TN: Boardman's Press 1992), 27-28.

God's promise to Abraham in (Gen. 22:17), was not only to Abraham but for all his descendants. We know that for many reasons Moses struggled at the beginning of his mission. He questioned God over and over with so many excuses. In the Exodus story it is important to note that the suffering of God's people has an impact on God. In the narrative God emphasized His concern about the treatment of His people in Egypt and said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering," (Exod. 3:7).

Many of the Israelites forgot that God rescued them by parting the Red Sea and they were able to cross on dry ground. The Israelites experienced new life during their transition from Egypt to the wilderness while on their way to the promise land. As Warren W. Wiersbe states in his commentary, "the Old Testament is God's continued story of His program of salvation that he announced to Adam and Eve, (Genesis 3:15), and to Abraham Genesis (12:1-3)."

Wiersbe continues, "That this explains why the Hebrew text of Exodus begins with the word, and for God is continuing with the story God stated in (Genesis 12:2. . . "I will make you a great nation; I will bless and make your name great." NKJV). Wiersbe states that, "the story won't end until God's people go to heaven and see Jesus on the throne."⁷ Wiersbe reminds us that God's plan of salvation will not end until Jesus returns at the end of time in fulfillment of God's promises. In the case of the Israelites, although they spent over four hundred years in slavery in Egypt, yet God remembered His

⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *the Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Colorado Spring, Co: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 2007), 148.

covenant with the descendants of Abraham and delivered them. God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt with His mighty power and led them into the wilderness to feed them with manna and quail. God's purpose was for the Israelites to be free to worship God, but the Israelites became disobedient to God. While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, they quickly forgot their deliverance and began to celebrate with a big party and worship the golden calf.

It is important for Israel to understand that it was not the golden calf that delivered them from Egypt, but the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Thomas Nelson reminded us in the *Liberty Bible Commentary* that, "When Moses continued to complain to God, 'Who am I that should go to Pharaoh to let Israel go?' (Exod. 3: 11,) 'But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel, out of Egypt?'" God answered Moses, certainly, I will be with thee, God plus one is always a majority."⁸ This interpretation by Thomas Nelson encourages that with the help of the Holy Spirit, Christians are not alone during this mission. As God clearly told Moses that "When you deliver the Israelites, and bring them to this mountain, you shall worship God on this mountain, (Exodus 3:12)."

David E. Gardner described the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter as "She made him her son, and she name him Moses, "which latter is an integral part of the adoption procedure." Further he said, "The description of God action and attributes in words usually associated with humankind about God seeing, hearing, knowing, concerned about His people and God coming down is being described as if God was

⁸ Thomas Nelson, the *Liberty Bible Commentary Volume One, Old Time Gospel Hours*, (Lynchburg VA: 1975), 28.

man.”⁹ It is clear to note that God is not man, but because of God’s love and concern for His people, came down to send a deliverer for His people. Because God said to Moses, “I have seen the misery of my people. . .” The important aspect of the conversation with God and Moses is God’s self-identification to Moses with the statement, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” (Exodus 3: 6a). God knows that Moses is about to struggle, to hesitate at the beginning of his call. God’s concern for the Israelites’ suffering and enslavement, and Moses’ concern why the bush was on fire but not consumed resulted in a mission to deliver God’s people. God’s self-identification to Moses was to clear Moses’ doubt if he was frightened or if he was not sure who was sending him on the mission. It is important to note that God, knew that Moses was familiar with the patriarch and his God. God used the patriarch’s Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to identify Himself to Moses.

God was concerned for the Israelites because the Israelites belong to a community, and this community was the descendant of the patriarchs. In the deliverance process, it is unique to note that Israel’s cries were heard because God remembered the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The reconnection process must take place only when this community is delivered from slavery to go and worship God. This began on the Mount of Sinai, where Moses was initially called. Even though it seemed that God remained quiet for over four hundred years, God did not forget about the Israelites.

⁹ David E. Garland, *The Exposition’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 365.

Larsson Goran, in *Bound for Freedom*, says that, “God remained silent in the first two chapters of Exodus and only focused on generations, and chapter two on Moses at one hundred and twenty years of age.” He continues that God appeared as the principal character to the place God chooses. He said, “Horeb, the mountain of God, which is Mount Sinai, where He will later reveal Himself to all Israel.”¹⁰ . . . God revealing Himself to all Israel was God’s own plan to communicate for the first time with the community of Israel. At the beginning of Moses’ call, God communicates with the Israelites through thunder and lightning, (Exod. 20:18-21). It is said that God came down to the mountain to speak to Moses and to Israel in a dark cloud. First, God revealed Himself to Moses through the burning bush and the fire. Larsson, in his commentary, states that, “both the fire and the bush in which God revealed Himself to Moses expresses something about God’s character, that fire burns and purifies.”¹¹ He states that, “When God is compared to a ‘devouring fire,’ the statement serves as a very strong warning not to break the commandment of God, (Deut. 4:23-24, Psalm 79:5).”¹²

God appearing to His servant is determined by God, not men. God uses fire, water, rain, and sunlight to show His power to humanity. God also appears to whoever God wants to use for any purpose. God’s angel appearing to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to announce to her about the birth of Jesus was the choice of God, (Lk 1:26). Johnson, in his commentary on the Bible says that, “the course of God’s plan embedded in the unfolding

¹⁰ Larsson Goran, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody MA, Hendricks Publishing Co. 1999), 27.

¹¹ Goran, 28.

¹² Goran, 28.

even is now disclosed,”¹³ It is clear in this project that God was now disclosing His long-awaited plan to Moses. Moses’ statement to God shows that Moses considered himself a common shepherd dwelling in the wilderness. His statement, “Who am I that I may go to Pharaoh to let Israel go,” (Exod. 3: 11), proved that he considered himself inadequate. Moses was surprised that God wants to use him to serve as deliverer for Israel. Moses was instructed by God to go and assemble the elders and the community of Israel to tell them that God wants to set them free to go and worship God,

God’s liberation plan was clear; it was to fulfill God’s promise for the patriarch’s descendants. George V. Pixley states that, “Yahweh, God of the Hebrews’ ancestors, presents the prophet Moses with this plan of action, whose purpose is to accomplish the flight from Egypt, and later the entry into the Promised Land where milk and honey flow. Within the account taken, this passage performs the function of preparing the reader for the action to come, and of offering a chronology of the liberation process.”¹⁴

New Testament Scripture: (Matthew 28:16-20).

The New Testament Scripture of the call to make disciples of all nations by Jesus is the key in Matthew (28:16-20). Following Jesus’ instructions to the women at the tomb, the disciples had to find their way to Galilee to meet with Him. According to David Hill, “the appearance to the disciples as representatives of the church is located in Galilee probably for theological reasons. ‘It ensures that the risen Christ and his teachings are not thought of as a substitute for but continues with Jesus’ ministry and teaching in

¹³ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴ George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 23.

Galilee.”¹⁵ He finally gave the disciples the authority and His promise to be with the church until the end of time.

The message focuses the assimilation of all people in every community into the Christian’s faith without limit. According to Daniel S. J. Harrington he states, “If the disciples are commissioned to make disciples of ‘all the Gentiles,’ the Great Commission may well have also carried a very concrete message to the Matthew community. ‘It would have had the function of urging a largely Jewish-Christian group to seek new members not so much from their fellow Jews as from non-Jews.’ ‘The gospel, which was preached first to Jews, Matthew 10:15, is now opened up to non-Jews.’ “Therefore, the Great Commission may mark the new beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Matthew community. ‘At the same time, it might carry the implication that all the Jews who could be expected to come to faith in Jesus had already done so. The mission field changes from other Jews to Gentiles. The church and the synagogue in Matthew’s area are thus on the way to definitive separation.”¹⁶ In deeper understanding, if the Jews of Jesus’ day thought that the gospel was only belonging to the Jews, they were now convinced by this final message from Jesus. The initial calling of the twelve disciples was limited according to (Matt. 10:5). In their first commissioning, the disciples were told not to go to Gentiles or Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of Israel. The only instruction that they did not change is to include ordinary people, whether educated or non-educated, rich or poor. It is clear in the initial calling scripture that those called by Jesus were ordinary fishermen, and tax collectors. They were not professional or educated people before their

¹⁵ David Hill, *The New Century Bible Commentary* (London, UK: Oliphant’s 1972), 361.

¹⁶ Daniel S. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew: Michael Glazier Book* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 416.

calling. In those days, fishing was not a field where an education was necessary. People learned a profession through their parents, such as in the case with Jesus. He was known as a carpenter through his earthly father, Joseph.

Richard B. Gardner in his book, *The Believer, Church Bible Commentary*, states that, “The very purpose of the denying of Jesus was because of his birth story and parents. ‘The meeting of the Sanhedrin described in (Matthew 12:14), recalls the anxious assembly of Herod and the religious leaders on the occasion of Jesus’ birth,’ (Matt. 2:3-4). “This meant that the religious leaders and King Herod did not truly believe that Jesus was the Messiah as they were expecting, for they knew his earthly father and mother, Joseph and Mary, and his birth place in Bethlehem of Judea.”¹⁷ The Great Commission clearly expands the first derivative that Jesus gave in chapter ten of Matthew. The assurance given by Jesus to be with the disciples might simply be because the disciples doubted.

As God had always used common people or ordinary people to do extraordinary things for God, Mary, the mother of Jesus, praised her Lord: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant,” (Luke: 1:46). “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go,” (Matt 28:16). This statement did not mention the presence of the women during the departure of the risen Christ. We notice in the death and resurrection story; the women were always present. The women were present at

¹⁷ Richard B. Gardner, *Believer Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 26.

the foot of the cross. When they returned from the empty tomb, they were excited to take the resurrection news to the rest of the disciples.

Douglas R. A. Hare states, “since women were not regarded as competent witnesses in the Jewish courts, it is clear that their presence in this narrative guarantees that it was not created to impress outsiders.”¹⁸ Leaving the women out of the story at the final commissioning did not recognize the importance of their message from the empty tomb. The presence of women must be recognized from the cross to the grave until the final departure of the risen Christ. The trinity is one of the most important formulas in the mission statement. During the baptism of Jesus according to Matthew, it is interesting that the Son was baptized by John. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the father spoke from Heaven, meaning that the Trinity were present. Jesus mentioned the Trinitarian statement in the final commissioning. It is likely that the father, son and the Holy Spirit always move together, none appear without the other.

Leon Morris states, “many scholars have raised doubt over part of the commission, especially the use of the Trinitarian formula for baptism.”¹⁹ There is no other place in Bible where Jesus uses the Trinitarian formula for baptism. Jesus in his first sending of his disciples according to (Matthew 10:1-24), did not use the Trinitarian formula until the final commissioning of the disciples.”²⁰ Making disciples cannot take place easily without the presence of the Holy Spirit, and this is the last word of the risen Christ before

¹⁸ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Printing Press, 1993), 331.

¹⁹ Frank W. Nelte, Our Trinitarian baptism formula, accessed March 10, 2018, https://www.franknelte.net/article.php?article_id=349.

²⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmann’s Publishing Company, 1992), 75.

ascending to heaven. The hope of the church depends on His last word, because when the early disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were filled with God's power and began to make disciples.

In the final commissioning, “teaching” is one of the main topic or events for the church. It is clear the mission of the risen Christ to the church focused on the teaching of Jesus Christ and His ministry. Following the ministry of Jesus’ healing, delivering, preaching and teaching are the focus points. Douglas, in his commentary for teaching and preaching, states, “The most remarkable feature of Matthew’s commissioning statement is the absence of any call to preach the gospel.” Hare said, “Jesus only mentioned that the disciples must teach the people to observe everything that he taught them during his ministry in verses twenty, “teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you.”²¹ Notice that in preparing the disciples, Jesus had trained and taught them for over three years before his farewell message. The risen Christ is sure that the disciples are trained and will follow the work, which he began. During Jesus ‘early ministry, the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5:1-16. His first public sermon is also called, “The Beatitudes,” and this preaching is also included in his farewell messages. In making disciples, the church is to preach, teach, deliver and heal, fulfilling the Great Commission. Notice here that the last word, “I am with you,” is for the church and for the whole congregation. It is also true that the commissioning of Jesus disciples was for empowerment in order to go and make disciples, but they were instructed to wait for the final power before going further, (Acts 2:8).

²¹ Hare, Matthew Interpretation, *A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 33.

To follow the commandments of the risen Christ, to make disciples, the church must pray sincerely to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the (Matthew 4:9), only God has divine authority. Jesus received this authority from the foundation of His ministry immediately after His baptism. We are told in Matthew 3:13, that after Jesus's baptism. the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove came over his head and the voice from the father was heard saying, "this is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," (Matt 3: 16-17).

The authority Jesus received from His Father at the beginning of His ministry is the authority He gave to His disciples to establish His new Church. The tempting of Jesus by the devil found in Matthew 4:1-11, proved that the devil has no authority or power to change God's plan. The devil was lying to Jesus trying to destroy his ministry; his authority cannot be compared to God's authority or power. Jesus as the second person of the Trinity received His power from the Father above. Accordingly, Jesus' authority is universal delegated to him by God. This emphasis laid the foundation of the command to make disciples of all nations. The passage of (Luke 4:6), shows that Jesus had His authority before the resurrection."²² We understand in this interpretation that Jesus was a greater Moses, and His deity as God gave the authority of His ministry following His baptism. In making disciples, Jesus therefore gave authority to His disciples over all the ministries of the church, including baptism, teaching, and preaching. Following the biblical stories, Matthew does not mention the appearance of Jesus to His disciples, but it is mentioned in (Luke 24:13-43), and (John 20:19-29), that Jesus did appear to His

²² Robert H. Gundry, *A Matthew Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*: (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 595.

disciples. The final appearance to the disciples was the call and empowering with the word of hope to go and make disciples to the entire world.

According to Stanley M. Horton, on (Matthew 28:16-20), “The eleven disciples, because Judas had gone on his own way, (Matthew 28:5), went to Galilee as the angels and Jesus had told them to go through the women, verses 7 and 10, to meet with Him.” Jesus wanted to give His disciples the commission in Galilee where his ministry began. This shows that the teaching of Jesus of Galilee, but continued it, verse twenty “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”²³ As previously mentioned, the call to Galilee by Jesus might have taken the disciples by surprise, because this mountain had not been mentioned or prescheduled for their meeting. It is uncertain if the disciples knew the purpose of their call to Galilee. In recalling the message or the command to the women by Jesus and the angels, it is believed that not only the eleven disciples were present it is likely that some of the women were present in Galilee with the eleven disciples, but they were not mentioned in the final commissioning. It is also indicated that the risen Lord did not only appear to the eleven, but more than the eleven, because it is mentioned He was seen by over five hundred brethren, (1 Cor. 15:6).

Michael Wilkins states, “The disciples may have been familiar with the mountain in Galilee which Jesus had told them to go. . . . “Jesus and the disciples familiarity with Galilee and their regular retreat to the hills to escape the press of the crowds implies that

²³ Stanley M. Horton, *The New Testament Study Bible: Matthew Complete Biblical Library* (Springfield, MO: John Knox publishing Company, 1991), 655.

there had been a pre-arranged meeting place.”²⁴ It seems that the mountain of Galilee may not have been the scene of the resurrection appearance nor the transformation. Following the farewell message of making disciples, it is not encouraging to understand that the disciples doubted when they worshipped the risen Christ. It is likely that their presence before the risen Lord had a divine experience before Jesus began to speak to them. Harrington states, “The scene has significant Christological element.” It is the risen Jesus who commissions the disciples. He said, “Jesus assumed the role that God plays in the prophetic commissioning, “Jesus shares in God” cosmic authority and he is able like God, to be with the disciples forever, even though he is not physically present.”²⁵ The focus of the call of the disciples to go to Galilee to the mountain was to receive the final command to go and make disciples of all nations and to teach them everything Jesus taught them during his ministry. It is clear in the Gospel according to Matthew that the last three chapters clearly showed the Roman’s authority and the Gentile world that God’s power is not to be contained by men. It is clear, that from Jesus’ arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, God’s power began to reveal to the very soldiers, when one of His followers Peter, took his knife and cut the ear of one of the soldiers. Jesus knew that His mission must be accomplished immediately healed the soldier’s ear. This must have been Jesus last miracle of healing another person physically before his death. Jesus’ last statement to His disciples, “to go and teach everything I have commanded you is part of what He did to the soldier by healing his ear. This means that the disciples must start to

²⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 189.

²⁵ Daniel S..J. Harrington, *the Gospel of Matthew: A Michael Glazier Book* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 549-550.

heal their very enemies even during their pain and suffering. This teaching of Jesus changed the golden rule He taught in (Matt. 7:12), “to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

The last commissioning word has a great impact on the Church as a whole, because of Jesus’ presence with the Church always until the end of the age. It is clear in Jesus’ last statement that the Church is the power of God’s presence or the Church represents God in this violent and sinful world. Following the command of Jesus, the teaching of the Church is powerful to bring change in every community and in every culture. Matthew 28 finally builds the hope of the Mathew’s congregation in a magnificent way. It is very interesting to see how the women played a meaningful role in the episode of the resurrection. In Matthew 28, it becomes clear that the women went to anoint the body of Jesus, but their anointing trip turned into being half-joyful and half-fearful, because they did not see Jesus in the tomb. Their joy was not full until the angels appeared to them and directed them to see the empty tomb, and to take the message to the disciples that he was risen. Knowing that the women were confused with fear, appeared to them on their way to take the message to the disciples. It is likely that because of cultural barriers, Matthew only recorded that the, “eleven disciples saw the risen Lord and they worshiped Him, but some doubted,” (Matt. 28:17).

John J. Kilgallen interpreted that;

The eleven disciples, now without Judas, and not yet joined by Matthias, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, follow the message of the women and head not only for Galilee, but for that “mountain” there which we have come to recognize as a symbol of the primary place of revelation. “All, even those who had initial doubts that Jesus was risen, fall down in recognition of Jesus lordship, of his being “God with us.” “Jesus comes close to them and speak, many think, in the words of that Son of man who, after suffering was to be given dominion and power and glory over all nations. Jesus as Lord of the mission, commands his

disciples to do three things: First, to make disciples, learners in all nations of the earth, Israel included; second, to include in this disciple-making a former, Public ceremony of baptizing whereby these disciples are consecrated to the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; third, to teach them to do what Jesus has taught his own eleven to do.”²⁶

Jesus’ mission is clear that as disciples of the risen Lord, we as well must make disciples of all nations. What happens to the salvation of those that have never been reached, never been taught, or never offered the possibility of becoming disciples at all? Is Matthew saying every Nation, and every person everywhere will be ministered to? It is the good promise and hope that strengthens the Christian’s Church. We learn the risen Lord will be with the Church until the end of the time. While the Church of Jesus Christ is heading out on its mission of salvation, it is likely that the world and those that disbelieve serve as disciples of deceits and committed to falsehood. In (Matthew 28:11-15), while the women were on their way with the good news to the disciples, the guards were also on their way to the city and reported to the chief priests, the religious leaders and the elders everything that had happened. It is clear in this study that the chief priests concluded with the guards that they should give the false report, that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus while they were asleep. In this manner, accepting the bribes from their boss, the chief priests, they carried false news that denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is clear in this light that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not please the authorities. It is also true that the soldiers, or guards were seeking to stay in favor with the chief priest, so they did as they were directed. While the disciples of Jesus were

²⁶ John J. Kilgallen, *A Brief Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 226.

doing as Jesus told them, to go to Galilee where they were directed. With the women serving as the first messengers, Thomas Long states,

“The women evidently conveyed the message to the disciples, because they go to Galilee to meet Jesus, just as they were directed.” “The opening sentence of this account is full of import: ‘Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.’ Matthew 28:16, ‘Abruptly Matthew’s readers are hit with the realization that ‘the twelve’ have become ‘the eleven.’ The treachery of Judas still hangs over the Easter community. Notice how the message to the women from the tomb quickly swift to the ‘mountain where Jesus had directed them,’ instead of the disciples to meet Jesus to Galilee.”²⁷

It seemed as if Jesus and His disciples had earlier discussed about meeting Him on this mountain. This is not the first time Matthew mentioned “mountain,” because the first public sermon of Jesus started while He went up on the mountain (Matt. 5:1-16), called the “Beatitude.” The Great Commission of the risen Lord must be in the present of the disciples to give them His final power and hope that He is with the church.

Leon Morris writes, “There was no denying that the body had been in the tomb when the stone was sealed.” “There was no denying that the body was no longer there. So, they had failed as guards. They could, of course, have told of the coming of the angels and of what he had done. But who would believe them?”²⁸ The chief priests agreed to cover the soldier’s mouth in order to cover the truth, because they backed the guards, if the news reached to the governor. Also, the high priests failed to remember that if the soldiers on guard said that they were asleep, how could they know who came to steal the body of Jesus from the tomb? How could a sleeping person tell what happened while they slept? The empty tomb and the appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples

²⁷ Thomas G. Long *on Mathew* (Louisville KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1997). 324.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 741.

served as proof of the resurrection. Leon Morris interprets the great commission by stating, “But the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain that Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, the worshipped, but some “hesitated,” (Matt. 28:16-17).”²⁹ The word “hesitated” used by Ivor H. Jones is not the same as “doubted,” used in other text of the final commission. In this study, each writer used different wording, but all lead to “the farewell message of Jesus to His disciples.”

The appearance of Jesus to the women with instructions for the disciples played an important role in the story of the Great Commission. Between the stories of Jesus talking with the women and the promise of His presence with the Church comes a story of bribery. The high priests in their effort of denying the resurrection’s story agreed to bribe the guards to lie. It is unfortunate that the authorities could not deny God power through Jesus. According to Ivor Jones, “The chief priests had feared a plot by the disciple, to subvert the truth by stealing the body of Jesus and claiming that Jesus had risen.”³⁰ ‘Now caught in their own machination, they are having to suppress the truth by bribing the guard to claim that such a plot had succeeded. They also have to offer protection for the guards in case the matter should come to the governor’s ears.’ ‘The episode ends with the information that the guard’s story is still current in Jewish circles.’ ‘Indeed, the final commissioning in Matthew showed God absolute power for Christians to use as the greater story in the Gospel. Christian must learn from the past to build the future. In the story of the resurrection, the women were first commissioned before the

²⁹ Ivor H. Jones, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster, UK: Epworth’s Press, 1994), 745.

³⁰ Ivor Jones, *Epworth Commentaries: The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Epworth Press, 1994), 173-174.

eleven. It is clear in (Matt 28:9-10), that Jesus himself not an Angel, appeared to the women and instructed them to go and tell His brothers to meet Him in Galilee.

Ivor Jones interpretation of the Great Commission states that, “The eleven disciples made their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to meet him.” The climax to the gospel directs the reader back to the story itself.”³¹ The point in this interpretation is, “made their way to Galilee.” “This seems to the reader that it was difficult for the disciples to freely travel during that time for fear of the Jews. “Made their way” is like travelling in secret because the traveler does not want to be seen by anyone. The point the risen Lord emphasized is, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” and this is the mission of the church. The focus of this project is the mission to make disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission instructed by Jesus himself in (Matt. 28:16-20).

Craig I. Blomberg rightly put it, “The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. “Sir, they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, “After three days I will rise again.”³² So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that He has been raised from the dead. “This last deception will be worse than the first.”³³ Following the ministry of Jesus, the chief priest and the Pharisee were witnesses to the healing miracles and raising the dead to life. Yet, they claimed to deny the fact of those healing. Instead of the chief priest and the

³¹ Jones, 173-174

³² Mathew 27: 63, The Study Bible, The Guards at the Tomb, <http://biblehub.com/matthew/27-63.htm>

³³ Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentaries on Matthew*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 424-425.

Pharisees considering themselves to be deceiving the people, they were claiming that on Jesus was the “deceiver,” but the good thing is, the end justified the means. We are told that Pilate agrees to meet the pharisees’ request and give them instructions of what they must do to protect the tomb.

According to Blomberg, “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go; make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So, they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.”³⁴ Now the chief priests and all those that were against Jesus resurrection, created their own stories that the disciples came to steal the body. It is clear their request was met. While the disciples did not steal the body before the guard arrived? Is it that the Jewish authorities believed or had heard about bodily resurrection? Again, through this study and other research, we have not heard of any Jewish, Greek, or Rome’s writer ever identified the tomb have great impact on the Christian faith, and the ascension and the promise of Christ being with the church is the hope of the Christian faith among other world religions. Meanwhile, continuing the unending story of the risen Christ and the mission of the church, we are told in this study that all the four Gospels testified that the women were the first to appear to the tomb after the burial of Jesus.

It is clear the women appeared to the tomb recorded accordingly in Matthew 27:61, 28:5-12, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-8, and John 20:1-10. In all these scriptures and many others, it is recorded that the women played an important role and supportive role in the ministry of Jesus Christ and even in the Christian Church today. Blomberg continued that, “The disciple’s response of the worship, like that of the women in (Mathew 28:9), strikes us as appropriate.” “But some of doubt” raised questions. Is this

³⁴Blomberg, 430.

a different group than those who worship? Was there a large gathering there than just the eleven disciples? What kind of doubt does Matthew have in mind? The latter question is more easily answerable.

The above paragraph is interesting in this project in connection to the “doubt” of the disciples who worshiped the risen Christ. The women’s faith could not have led them to easily doubt when they saw Him during their final commissioning. If the women could remember the statement made by Jesus during the Passover meal about His resurrection, they knew that something was to take place. If the women were with the eleven disciples in Galilee during the final commissioning, they could not doubt as the scriptures said.

Another commissioning statement by Blomberg says, “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”³⁵ Blomberg continued that, “Jesus is passing the torch to His disciples even as He promises to be with them forever—Spiritually, not physically, to empower them for future mission.”³⁶ It is expedient to see that the last statement found in Matthew 28:18-20 brings the reader to the scene and conclusion of the Gospel of Mathew. Jesus’ statement representing the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit gives power to the Christian Church with the assurance that, we are not alone, but God is with us, Emmanuel.

³⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentaries on Matthew*, (Nashville TN. Boardman’s Press 1992), 430-431

³⁶ Blomberg, 430.

The purpose of this project is to emphasize the main theme commanded by Christ Himself, commissioning His disciples to “Make Disciples,” (Matt 28:16-20). It seemed that the local church had played little attention to this main mission statement. We often see that missionaries must “go,” but not only to “go” but to “make disciples” to fulfill Christ commands. We must make disciples not only where we are, but to “go.” When we go, we must make disciples, so that the church will continue to grow. The universal Church must remember how Jesus’ ministry continued to grow in the three years, according to the biblical story. We read that Jesus fed more than five thousand men beside women and children in one setting. In another passage, He also fed more than four thousand men beside women and children. Some of our churches has existed in some communities for over a hundred years, yet they have very poor attendance. In the same neighborhood there are more un-church people than those that attend church.

It seems in these communities that the church continues to marginalize the rest of the people either because of cultural, language difference, or discrimination. At this point we encourage the church to remember the “others.” As we read the biblical stories, the church must remember that the ministry of Jesus mainly focuses on the “others,” in healing, teaching, preaching, and delivering. If the church will follow the teaching of Jesus’ ministry, then the church must obey the Great Commission instructed by the risen Christ, to continue the teaching of His ministry. As this project emphasizes (Matt. 28:16-20), as one of the main focuses in this disciple making is. This command “to go to all nations. . .” is every community where we live, or find ourselves, and find people of every colors, language, or culture without boundary. This is the only way that the

universal Church will grow in every city, village, or community, so that the gospel must reach the unreached.

Conclusion

To conclude the Biblical Foundations, it is clear that the mission focus on delivering people from sins and slavery to turn and worship God, simply “disciple making.” And again, the theme for this doctoral project is “Assimilating the Liberian Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania. We focus the theme on assimilation, and this includes but is not limited to delivering people from whatever is holding them back from worshipping God, to connect them and enable them to be able to worship God. It is interesting to take into consideration God’s action in the life of His people, from the Israelite to that of the followers of Jesus. Both focus on the mission to deliver God’s people to worship God. Beginning with the Old Testament scriptures, it is interesting to see how God got involved by listening to the crying voices of His people in Egypt to send a deliverer Moses on a possible mission for liberation. As in the New Testament of Matthew, it is clear how Jesus as the Messiah gave His final commissioning message to His followers. The good news is that God is still concerned and motivated to act in a situation of terrible hurt and pain for God’s people. Matthew 28: 16-20), empowered the followers with hope of the Christian Church that God is always involved to deliver His People. The church is to encourage and invite people from all backgrounds despite our human difference.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Assimilating the Liberia Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol, Pennsylvania is the theme of this Doctor of Ministry Project. The goal is to welcome and encourage the present minority Liberian Community members so they can invite others to join them become part of the church. In this Historical Foundations chapter, John Wesley's history of bringing people into the church known today as United Methodist is mostly discussed. The chapter will evaluate how Wesley started to minister to others known today as United Methodists and had now grown into other denominations and many institutions of learning in and around the world. It is encouraging that John Wesley had a mission when he started the "Holy Club or Class Meeting" on Oxford's Campus during the seventeenth century. This mission serves as the model of the "Connection" and the means of inviting all to Christ.

John Wesley's stories are relevance in ministering to all in England at the time to bring people to Christ regardless of their social status was crucial. Meanwhile the Liberian communities are mostly people escaping from sixteen years of civil crisis and coming into the United States for safety. They are searching for opportunities for education, employment transportation, owning a home and more. Many of these people did not have an opportunity for these things. It is the goal of this project to connect the Liberian Community to First United Methodist Church and to remind them that God

brought them to this land of opportunity because God loved them and had a plan and purpose for them.

In England at that time, John Wesley saw the need to evangelize and to administer to people, while offering encouragement to the poor, the minorities and the imprisoned. John Wesley's goal at the time was to evangelize England, so he began to preach and spreading the Gospel with itinerant preaching. His initial group from Oxford's Campus was described as "The Holy Club, the Bible Moths, and Methodist Societies."¹ Wesley's tradition developed tremendously and grew in circuits including class meetings, the love feast and extended preaching and prayer. An evangelizing movement that regarded the proclamation of the Gospel was its primary task. The Holy Club that he founded on campus was an effective way for people to develop their spiritual lives. Under his leadership, the club continued to grow into a large body.

John Wesley, while fulfilling his mission, was considered a distinguished figure of extraordinary merit. As an influential minister, he believed that his main mission at the time was to preach to the un-churched and the poor at the time. Kenneth Kinghorn states, "As a young man he wrote, "As my tongue is a devoted thing, I hope. . .to use it only as such, that all who hear me may know of a truth; the words I speak are not mine, but Him that sent me."² Indeed, both John Wesley's tongue and pen were devoted things, because he served as an author, evangelist, preacher, theologian, priest, bishop, pastor, teacher. Wesley's hundred and fifty sermons or more, are all part of his mission make

¹ "The Holy Club," Christianity Today, Originally published in Issue 2: John Wesley: Leader of the Methodist Movement, 1983 Originally Published in 1983, accessed October, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-2/holy-club.html>

² Kenneth C. Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermon on Modern English*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10.

disciples for Christ. These disciples are known today as United Methodists and other Wesleyan denominations. Wesley's calling was both ordinary and extraordinary because of the ministries he established. Wesley's establishment of his children's ministry in Georgia and his instructions and his emphasis to his preachers to minister to children were part of his goal to fight not for his own salvation, but for the salvation for children as well. For Wesley, his primary focus was to awaken sleeping sinners, because he wanted everyone to be saved by God's grace through faith.

While Wesley never left the Church of England, this was the starting point in the history of Methodism or the beginning of Methodism. Connecting people to the Church of Jesus Christ was the main goal of John Wesley when he started the Holy Club Movement. For this project, it is the goal to assimilate and connect everyone especially the Liberian Community of Bristol, Pennsylvania into First United Methodist Church. This is especially so with African Liberians who are immigrants, refugees, and visitors traveling to the United States. Some of these travelers feel disconnected from their home church, The United Methodist Church of Liberia. They miss their church traditions and they need to be connected. Some of these Liberians do not have a church to attend, so they are visiting a variety of congregations.

To identify some of the earlier disciples in the Christian Church, Richard N. Longenecker states,

The first disciples of Jesus came from among the ranks of the followers of John the Baptist, John 1: 36-51. In the process of making disciples, John the Baptist is portrayed as the first to bear witness to Jesus, identifying him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," John 1: 29, 35. A Christological title

in John's Gospel occurs at this point. There is no hint that the disciples even slowly became aware of who Jesus was, as in the Synoptic Gospel.”³

Disciple making continues from that point in the New Testament up to this time as the mission of the church. Continuing the mission of the church, John Wesley used the word, "Connection" in many ways as a means of making disciples that led to a tremendous growth in what is today known as “The United Methodist Church.” Most people who were connected to Wesley became connected to Methodism.

In the process of continued disciples-making, according to Leroy Eims,

What Jesus told Peter primarily was to feed the lambs and the sheep? So here were three thousand lambs, newly born into the kingdom of God. And the mandate for Jesus was that they must be fed, and they must be disciples. In order to provide food and housing for those who needed to be fed and disciples, those who originally had no intention of staying in Jerusalem for any length of time, the Apostle took some emergency measures. These would enable the new believers to stay and receive the follow-up training and help they would need.⁴

To move further in making disciples, we examine John Wesley when he started to set the foundation of doctrines and discipline for those lay-preachers in the connection with him at the time. He started with a class meeting on the Oxford campus in England with a regular meeting with Bible studies and prayer meetings on a regular basis. We do not know if Wesley's intention was to spread the movement as it is today in and around the whole world. The movement started to grow gradually from class meetings to society; he began to appoint lay-preachers on an itinerant basis to go around preaching. To further spread the movement known today as Methodism, the initial history says that John, Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were the first three ministers to start the

³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 79.

⁴ Leroy Eims, *The Lost Arts of Disciple Making*: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 42.

itinerant preaching. Wesley's strategy of itinerant preaching was to touch every life in every community and to reach the "unreachable" especially the poor or the have-nots.

Following the Revival of 1739-1744, we are told that more lay-preachers known as 'helpers' or 'assistants' were appointed and added to the three clergy by Wesley to further spread the preaching of the early Methodism. More discussions in conferences allowed the founding leaders to set goals for the movement to concentrate on preaching to unbelievers for justification. Furthermore, they also concentrated on those in the society to lay the foundation deeper on "perfection." As the beginning conferences discussed the basic doctrines to clearly define their mission, Richard P. Heitzenrater states, "Wesley warned that Justification should not be deprecated in order to exalt the state of full Sanctification. At the same time the emphasis on 'Sola fide' should not exclude the need to press for repentance and 'works meet for repentance, 'prior to Justification.⁵" The statement made by Wesley is that he was focusing on "Spiritual Holiness." While John Wesley and his colleagues continued to spread their teaching of Methodism; it was not approved by the Evangelical Church of England. They were accused of teaching a different doctrine. Wesley and his colleagues had even licensed their lay preachers, according to the history to administer the Sacrament. This meant that they had moved from the Church of England when the movement started to grow. This was the beginning of making more disciples of Jesus Christ in Methodism.

According to Ryan Nicholas Danker, Charles Wesley sent a letter to the Church of England regarding their oppositions stating:

⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 152.

Our preaching-houses are mostly licensed and therefore proper (Dissenting) meeting -houses. Our preachers are mostly licensed and so are the dissenting ministers. They took out their licenses as Protestant Dissenters. Three of our steadiest preachers give the Sacrament at Norwich with no other ordination or authority than their sixpenny license. My brother approves of it. All the rest will most probably follow their example." At this point, it was to their oppositions' surprise."⁶

Our goal for this project at First United Methodist Church of Bristol is to remind the Liberian Community that God saved them and brought them to the United States for a purpose. For those living in Bristol, one of the purposes is to come together and assimilate into FUMC of Bristol for worship and to serve our God. According to Paul W. Chilcote, "God's call to mission aligns the Covenant Community with the Kingdom. This orientation of the mission of the missional church toward the reign states that,

Disciples of Christ attend to all who cry out of pain, (oppressed people and nature). God's reign and the poor, in other words as Araya have argued, are inextricably intertwined: The community of Jesus' followers does not exist as end in itself, but for service to the world in the service of the reign of God."⁷

Therefore, we are all representative of Jesus' disciples to go and make disciples; we are the ambassadors of Jesus Christ and we must continue the mission of the church by connecting people to Jesus' ministry through disciple-making.

Disciple making is different or has several meanings to different writers. In a specific sense, Malphurs says, "A disciple is one who has trusted in Christ as Saviour. In short, he or she is a Believer in Christ or a Christian (other perfectly acceptable Biblical

⁶ Ryan N. Danker, *Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelism* (Chicago, IL: Academic and in Print of Intervarsity Press, 2016), 158.

⁷ Paul W. Chilcote, *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission and Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 203.

terms are ‘brothers,’ sisters, ‘Saint,’ and so on).”⁸ We are Believers in Christ and the Great Commission, and we are instructed to go out and encourage others to join us therefore, making more disciples for Christ's Kingdom. The connection is that we are connected to Christ, and we must connect others to Him through disciple-making. When new disciples join us in the body of Christ, they become learners when we baptize and teach them. They are new converts who have agreed to make Christ the Lord and Savior of their lives. Aubrey Malphurs also talks about committed and uncommitted disciples, but we must make the calling according to the Gospel. There are patterns to follow in making disciples. Making disciples under Wesley's influence continued until around the end of the eighteenth century; then it became a revolution. History says this revolution for England was of a spiritual nature, led not by an army but by Anglican revivalists. This revolution was known as, "The Wesleyan Revolution." In England, there was a division between the poor and the rich; at that point, the poor had gained the means to realize that they could overcome their plight.

Although they were poor, they had corrected the social problem and understood the teachings of John Wesley on practices and politics. Further in Wesley's teaching, he was disappointed when he returned to England from an unsuccessful missionary trip to Georgia. His disappointment was over his own spiritual condition and the venture to America. In his continued searching for the assurance of God's pardon and interacting with a small group of fellow seekers, he came to the point that he "felt his heart strangely warmed," and this according to him was his own “Spiritual rebirth.” After this time,

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books Publishing Company, 2009), 33.

Michael Henderson states, "accompanying his own Spiritual rebirth came as a compelling vision to search the whole of England with the message of God's redemptive power. He chose as his goal: to spread spiritual holiness throughout the land."⁹

Wesley's vision to spread the message of God's redemptive power was at the right time, because England was experiencing hardship of holiness. It is understood that the rich people continued to get rich and the poor continued to get poor. The poor attended church as George Whitefield preached under Wesley's influence in open fields. More mine workers and field workers gathered as Whitefield preached; thousands gathered to hear him preach. D. Michael Henderson also says, "Whitefield described their hearty response:

Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend of publicans, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions. The event proved happily ending in a sound and thorough conversion. The change was visible to all, though numbers chose to impute it to anything, rather than the finger of God.¹⁰

As John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield continued to make disciples, more and more were converted to the faith especially field and mine workers. Making disciples in a local church is a good way of growing the local congregation. The good model of making disciples, especially when the local church is a welcoming congregation, will help the local congregation with church health and growth. There is a story of a United Methodist Circuit in Zimbabwe that holds a revival as a way of evangelism. Hosting a

⁹ D. Michael Henderson, John Wesley's class meeting, *A Model for Making Disciples*: (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury printing Press, 1997), 18.

¹⁰ D. Michael Henderson, John Wesley class meeting, *A Model for Making Disciples*, (Nappanee IN. 1997), 26.

revival four times or more by a District or Circuit usually encourages new members to join the local congregation. Paul W. Chilcote says;

Shemkuru United Methodist Church is unique in the sense that, for almost its entire years, the Circuit has continuously witnessed a transformation both within the congregation and in the surrounding Communities that is tantamount to a continuous revival. The purpose of this chapter is to share with the reader a vital ministry going on at Sherukuru United Methodist Church. At Sherukuru, there is a ministry that focuses on disciple making by reaching out to all people in the valley with the Gospel, emphasizing both evangelism that introduces people to Christ and education that enables those who have believed the Gospel to understand what Christian discipleship means. This ministry also exposes the falsehood of some messengers who claim to be prophets, when actually they are "savage wolves" among the people, (Acts 20:29). Sherukuru has discovered the Matthias model of making disciples, where evangelism and Christian education go hand in hand, Matt: 28:19.¹¹

According to this study, there were challenges of violence and a political fear in the mind of the pastors and the believers in the community at the time, Zimbabwe had gone through wars in 1960 and 1970, but the church continued to fulfill its mission.

At any given time, any strategy set in place to assimilate disciples that are found to be a part of a local congregation when they are welcome, will bring growth to the church. When the local church accepts everyone in the community regardless of their language, color and cultural background, there will always be a growth in strength and number. When everyone is encouraged to be a part of the local church without leaving the "other," God's Holy Spirit gets involved. The history of Methodism says that John Wesley's greatest influential instructional unit was the setting of class meetings. His greatest contribution to teach group experiences encouraged everyone including the poor and the have-nots continued to be a part of the new movement. One of the main facts about the class meeting is that it developed a fund-raising program. The class meetings

¹¹ Chilcote, *Making Disciples in a World Parish*, 49-50.

goal was to provide the leaders the opportunity to watch over each member of the group. The societies were divided into a group of twelve, with a leader who was scheduled to meet every member during the week to see how their soul was doing and to also watch their behavior for Spiritual growth. While thinking to collect the penny due to a lot of poor in the society, God provided another leader. D. Michael Henderson again states,

Let everyone member of the society gives a penny a week, till all are paid." Another answered, "But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it." "Then," said he, "put eleven of the poorest with me, and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as myself; and each of you call upon eleven of your neighbors weekly; receive what they give and make up what is wanting." It was done. In a while some of them informed me "such and such" did not live as he ought." It struck me immediately, "This is the thing, the very thing we have wanted so long. I called together all the leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their companies) and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from their evil ways, and some were put away from us."¹²

It is clear from this strategy of making assimilation, everyone especially the poor were encouraged to continue to be a part of the group and the financial problem began to be solved, and growth in strength and numbers greatly occurred. Today John Wesley's ministry has grown to millions of people and organizations around the world. According to Andy and Sally Langford, "the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of the power of God to bring Salvation to those who believe (or trust) in the faithfulness of Christ. Properly understand, our faith is not the foundation of redemption, but Christ's faith is. Faith in the sense of putting our trust in Christ is the means for us to participate in the faithfulness and Salvation of Christ. The foundation of Salvation is the faithfulness of

¹² Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 94-95.

Christ, that is, the death and resurrection of Christ.¹³ Wesley's understanding of his teaching was to follow scripture. He followed the teaching of Paul on (Eph. 2:8). His teaching is that we are justified by grace through faith and this teaching was a powerful force to renew the church in his day. To justify is "to make righteous, being transformed as righteous. We can only be righteous by his Grace, because God's grace is a gift for us. We are sanctified by God's Grace, for God wants us to be Saints set aside for God's purposes.¹⁴

Through organizing small groups in every city, town and village Wesley's establishment of Sunday school classes and disciple's Bible classes are all means of making disciples. The history of Wesley's ministry according to Andy and Sally Langford states, "Wesley established an orphanage and Sunday school, a free medical dispensary, a credit union with micro-loans, food pantries, and clothes closets. He empowered women as leaders to serve in certain positions. Methodists discovered their own leadership skills and became community leaders."¹⁵ All of Wesley's ministry is seeking ways of making disciples and giving people the opportunity to rediscover their own spiritual gifts to lead and serve. The organization of these various ministries provides more openings for people in the local settings and community churches to take responsibilities, and to create more leaders for future services in the church. Continuing to make disciples, this study shows that Wesley's teaching laid the foundation that

¹³ Andy Langford and Sally Langford, *Living as United Methodist Christians: Our Story Our Beliefs, Our Lives* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 47.

¹⁴ UB David & I'll B Jonathan, Advanced Studies, "Lesson 10: Made Righteous in Christ," The mailing box club, Accessed on March 10, 2018, <http://ubdavid.org/advanced/great-salvation/great-salvation10.html>.

¹⁵ Langford, A. and S. 47.

people who came to believe in Christ as Methodists would become faithful followers and a holy community.

Wesley did this by organizing and encouraging every person who was connected to him to be a participant. Kevin M. Watson says, "Wesley's goal was not to get as many people as he could to pray a certain prayer; rather his goal was to get as many people as he could to trust in Christ, not just for one moment, but for the rest of their lives and with all their lives."¹⁶ This statement implies that it is another thing to bring people to Christ by a local church and another thing to keep those that come and to grow. In John 21, Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep." We as shepherds must feed the sheep as we gather them, or they will not stay in our sheepfold. John Wesley started the style of the early Believers in his disciples-making. His style was to encourage everyone, especially the poor and the needy. Wesley used those that were available and willing. To make disciples is to encourage and use ordinary people make themselves available. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn states, "John Wesley made every effort to communicate with ordinary people by using plain sentences. In the preface of his sermons, he said,

I dare no more write in fine style than wear a fine coat. But, were it otherwise, had I time to spare, I should still write just as I do. I should purposely decline, what many admire, a highly ornamental style. I cannot admire French oratory; I despise it from my heart. Let who will admire the French frippery, I am still for plain, sound English. As for me, I never think of my style at all; but just set down the words that come first. Only when I transcribe anything for the press, then I think it my duty to see that every word, and phrase be clear, pure and proper. Conciseness (which is now, natural to me) brings... ..strength {to writing}. If after all, I observe any stiff expression, I throw it out, neck and shoulder.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kevin M. Watson, *Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living: A Blue Print for Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009), 37.

¹⁷ Kenneth C. Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Methodism* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2014), 15-16.

We must gather all the requirements to build a new community where person can grow in disciples-making. In order to grow the new communities, something must be used to help the people come and stay together. The one thing most needed is to makes everyone feel welcome and accepted. I love the way one of our own brothers put it by saying, "Love creates community." "It is love that holds community together to truly include everyone no matter what their background. Rudy Rasmus put it right when he said, "When we begin to reach out to others with unconditional love, we create community. An authentic, a Christ-like community is one that calls for all people involved to be loved, no matter their job, status, gender, class, or place of residence. God has promised to help us in our charitable work as we strive to create a community of unconditional love: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matt 25:40).¹⁸

If the church becomes the community of true love to accept everyone no matter what background, color, language and status, the church will surely grow. The community of unconditional love will encourage everyone, and everyone will want to be a part. This is the model the early disciples used to make disciples, and the church continues to grow wherever the Gospel was preached.

The History of Making disciples by John Wesley also derived from his many sermons. While travelling abroad to Georgia in 1735-1736, we are told that John Wesley covered the sermons preached by the Lord Jesus himself. Expanding on the Sermon on the Mount once more, Wesley referred to it as "One pretty remarkable precedent of field

¹⁸ Rudy Rasmus, *Love, Period: When All Else Fails* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing House, 2014), 106.

preaching."¹⁹ In his field preaching of more than one hundred and fifty sermons, his texts were drawn from Jesus' Sermon on the Mountain. Preaching on the Sermon on the Mountain, he divided the text into sections in Matthew 5:1-4. He preached at Bowling Green in 1739, at Bexley in 1740, at Oxford in 1771, and at Edinburgh the year after that. On Matthew 5:1-4 to Collins and Vickers, "Way to the Kingdom, "written in 1746, not only to see the goal of the Christian life in terms of happiness and holiness. Although, Wesley calls happiness and holiness the staples of life. Wesley called, "The inward kingdom of God," the lines of repentance specifically in the form of poverty of spirit. Indeed, though "the rich, the wise" account such a spirit as madness Wesley affirmed in this present sermon that real Christianity always begins in poverty in spirit."²⁰ So if one understood such poverty, it does not refer to an economic condition or to "outward circumstances. Instead, it highlights the penitence, 'the deep sense of sinfulness, guiltiness and helplessness,' (Matt. 5:3), that marks the hearts of sinners who know their need of the Savior."²¹

Wesley was preaching the sermon of Jesus, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus saw that most of those that followed him were poor people for they were seeking a spiritual blessing. Wesley and his followers were making disciples by encouraging his colleagues and students on Oxford's campus, these

¹⁹ Christian Classics Ethereal library, Journal of John Wesley, "Wesley Begins Field-preaching:", accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iii.i.html>.

²⁰ T.Jackson (Ed), Sermons on several occasions , Google Book, accessed March 10, 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=dR7cV0xjOGEC&pg=PA250&lpg=PA250&dq=real+Christianity+always+begins+in+poverty+in+spirit.&source=bl&ots=G_TdJOqQ1S&sig=qFl43GZwHT-JD4h27yvmZArMPSc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiUscKypeLZAhUHXIMKHZ2mDLUQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=real%20Christianity%20always%20begins%20in%20poverty%20in%20spirit.&f=false

²¹ Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers, *the Sermon of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 473.

were probably low class or poor people, but these were the people that were willing to follow, to take instructions of taking the gospel message to the next person. He re-interpreted the Sermon on the Mountain or the beatitude to the understanding of his congregation. Wesley believed that spiritual change begins from the heart, and that change is inward experience, not only outward appearance as a Christian. Wesley was preaching from his Alders gate experience when he felt his heart was extremely warmed. This experience caused a complete change in his life.

As John Wesley continued his ministry on making assimilation, he elaborated on one of his main sermons about Christian practice. As a practical preacher, Wesley points to the way to be saved by God's grace. Wesley in his sermon on the topic, "The Scripture Way of Salvation."

This sermon combines and summarizes the thoughts of several other sermons by Wesley, including Salvation by Faith, Justification by Faith, and the Circumcision of the heart. History has judged this message as one of Wesley's most helpful discourse. Indeed, of all Wesley's sermon, The Scripture way of salvation is his best summary of the order of salvation. The immediate object of this printed discourse is to counter the doctrine that saving faith is a mere intellectual assent to the truth of the Christian gospel in an earlier sermon, Wesley had stated, with regard to the nature of this faith, it is not (as some have fondly conceived) a bare assent to the truth of the Bible, of the articles of our Creed or of all that is contained in the Old and New Testaments. The devils believe this, as well as we do; and yet they are devils still.²²

Wesley wanted to emphasize that in order to be a Christian, one must experience their relationship with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. He believed that salvation comes when we sanctify ourselves because of our faith, because we are saved by grace through faith. He believed that the just shall live by faith and the heart must be

²² Kenneth C. Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermons in Modern English*, vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 188.

completely changed. In order to succeed in making assimilation, Wesley did not directly oppose slavery upon his arrival in America. For the propagation of the Gospel, he followed the Anglican position and the attitude of the society at the time. It seemed that Wesley's ministry in Georgia was successful because of the sponsorship of the Anglican society. Even his close associates who served as leaders of the Moravians could not convince Wesley to attack the slavery issue. Wesley quietly kept his view toward the slavery act until later. This early phase of Wesley's activity to improve the situation of black slaves was characterized by mild protest against certain wretched conditions approved by the colony administration's refusal to admit slaves and a pastoral concern for individual blacks.²³ Wesley was known to conversed individually with the black slaves, whom he met about God and the soul as he did with whites. He planned a preaching service especially for them and instructed them in foundation of the Christian faith.

By collecting funds for a school, securing literature, and establishing contact with other pastors' active among the black slaves, Wesley saw to it that educational work could be conducted among them. Wesley continued this pastoral and pedagogical care as time and opportunity allowed him even after his return from America in 1738. In evangelistic and pastoral praxis, Wesley did not distinguish between white and black, free and slaves; people from both groups were won to the Christian faith by his preaching. Slaves were baptized and admitted to the Lord's Supper together with all

²³ Dean G. Blevins "Practicing the new creation: Wesley's eschatological community formed by the means of grace" *The Asbury theological journal* fall 2002 spring 2003 vol. 57 / vol. 58 no. 2/ no:1, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=asburyjournal>, P.1(81-84).

people. Similarly, in America, Methodist preachers and slave's owners gathered slaves into "classes" and accepted them into their congregations.²⁴

It is believed that Wesley was strongly praying and reading the scriptures daily about how he could react toward the slavery acts when he arrived in South Carolina, because he was concerned about the wellbeing of the poor. Wesley did not distinguish between races but ministered the Gospel to all. Wesley used the early church model and both blacks and whites received one another as brothers and sisters in the faith. Those to whom the word of God reached without restriction were greatly encouraged. Wesley used Paul's examples and the idea of Disciple-making in Galatians 3:28. Further in this project, we must emphasize that Wesley was not only a preacher, teacher, and a theologian, but also a missionary and a bishop as well. This was John Wesley's goal to make more disciples in America through the Methodist movement today known as the United Methodist Church. Kenneth J. Collins says,

Exercising the role of a bishop at the 1784 conference, Wesley set apart Thomas Coke as Superintendent by the imposition of hands and by prayer. Wesley's diary referred to this event using the language of "Ordained." The Journal however, stated that, "Dr. Thomas Coke was "appointed," though the actual certificate given to the now "Superintendent" employed the words, "Set apart." Once in America, Thomas Coke had instruction to consecrate Francis Asbury as general Superintendent, a ceremony that took place at the founding Christmas Conference of 1784. Beyond this, Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as "Elders" in order to foster the work of the Methodist Movement in America.²⁵

The means of making disciples by John Wesley was not only by his preaching of the Gospel for people to turn to God. He empowered and set people and other ministers apart and sent them to go and preach to make disciples. The goal of this chapter is not

²⁴ Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1992), 71.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley, A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2003), 232.

only to clarify how Wesley ordained or consecrated ministers, but that he empowered and both lay people and elders for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ. John Wesley may be considered the first Bishop of the United Methodist Church because of the role he played. He was a missionary and bishop after serving as teacher, theologian and preacher from the founding of the movement. His goal was to inspire others to make more disciples, and this is what preaching, teaching and empowering people to "go" with the message of the Gospel is all about. We must remember that as ministers, we must change ourselves in our hearts before we change the "others." As Rem B. Edwards put it, "People are to be valued for their own sake, not merely because they are useful to us or share our skin color, customs, prosperity, or practices, and not merely because they conform to, accept or agree with our ideas, ideals, beliefs, and preconceptions."²⁶

Furthermore, Christian salvation is offered primarily to unique conscious individuals, not to non-conscious things, not to social orders, and not to ideas, ideals, or beliefs as such. We are not instructed to love things, practices, customs, societies, or doctrines with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. We are not told that Christ came to save material, social, or conceptual objects of value. The Good Shepherd is passionately concerned for all lost sheep, each of whom is a unique conscious individual, and not merely as instances of "humanity," "rationality," "Methodist," Christianity" (John 10:11-16). Societies and human institutions are to be transformed and thus "saved" or redeemed in some secondary senses . . . Yes, societies, social institutions and social

²⁶ Rem B. Edwards, *John Wesley's Values and Ours* (Lexington, NY: Emeth Press, 2012), 23.

arrangements are to be "Saved" or transformed into something better, for example, the kingdom of God, but not for their own sake.²⁷

Wesley in his ministry to make more disciples was a compassionate leader. He was concerned about the needy, especially the widows and the orphans. He was invited to address a solemn gathering of victims of the American Revolution that caused a high number of casualties among British soldiers. Wesley in his compassion spoke of the nation's miseries and made it one of the saddest moments as he defended the rule of law. He used the story of King David, a shepherd whose sin or actions caused many innocents to suffer in the hand of God's angel. According to Thomas C. Oden, "when David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. Those are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family."²⁸

Speaking on the occasion for the benefit of the widows and the orphans of fallen soldiers, Wesley warned, Beware how impute this {conflict} is to the fountain of love and holiness.²⁹ Speaking at St. Matthew Church in London, he asked, "Who is left amid this madness to care for the wife of the soldier's youth who is 'now a disconsolate widow' often with no one to care for her? She is 'deprived of her only comfort and support, and not knowing where to lay her head.'"³⁰

²⁷ Edwards, 23.

²⁸ Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 130

²⁹ Oden, 130.

³⁰ Ibid., 130.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to note that Francis Asbury, Capt. Thomas Webb, and John Wesley's portrait is in the narthex at First United Methodist Church of Bristol. It is mentioned in the history of First United Methodist Church of Bristol that Francis Asbury did much of his disciple-making and itinerant preaching in this area, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. Pennsylvania. It is also mentioned that Francis Asbury conducted a Camp Meeting in the Bristol area.

Conclusion

In concluding the historical foundations chapter, it is interesting to note that the history of ministering to all is the mission of the church. Jesus, through His ministry, provided the greatest example of how to make disciples. His ability to reach out to people in the community and beyond His boundary was clearly His strength and effort to call everyone to His ministry. Jesus' strategy of making disciples was unique and when followed by the church will provide continued growth. He did not just feed the multitudes with spiritual and physical food, He provided spiritual and physical healing to all who came to Him for help.

On the mission of making disciples of the church, John Wesley continues today with millions of members known as The United Methodists and other Wesleyan denominations. These Wesley messages on "Salvation and the Christian life" were all practical in his writing and preaching. Before we end with the story of the Wesley strategy of making disciples, we must remember how the early disciples followed Jesus' example, in the early history of the Christian Church.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Assimilating the Liberian Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania is the focus of this doctoral project. Research reveals that there are many ways of assimilating people into the church in every community, city, town and village. There are several models relating to bringing people to Christ in various settings by different groups of a local church. These models include theological models that create a growing church. These models will assist in creating a new idea that will equip us in the successful process of assimilation. Evangelism and assimilation are crucial in the Christian Church, because they are keys in church health and growth.

In this theological foundation chapter, the study of religious faith, practice, and the experience of assimilation in the local church is the focus. This will carefully be examined as well as various theologian's views, attitudes and their insights. It is crucial that the church must fulfill its mission to reach the unreached or un-churched and those on the margin. This project is purposely being undertaking, because if First United Methodist of Bristol can provide a food pantry that can feed more than one hundred families per week, the church must meet their spiritual needs as well.

In reflecting on a theological perspective as it relates to assimilation and it is important to first define theology. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, theology can be defined as, “The study of religious faith practices and experience, the study of God and God’s relation to the World, or a system of religious beliefs and ideas.”³¹ In a definition of disciples, Charles Riggs and Tom Philips say, “A disciples is a learner-a follower of Christ. . . True disciples will daily recognize Christ as Lord and be willing to put Him ahead of every pursuit in life.”³² In many places in the scriptures, Jesus described His disciples as those who follow His teachings and learn. In the absence of discipleship, the local church may decline or die because there may be no growth. Assimilation is: The process by which a person acquires the social and psychological characteristics of a group. In the Theological Foundations chapter, we will research and discuss how other writers used different strategies of making disciples and how each process relates to the project.

Assimilation by visitation and invitation of those that visit our food pantry and other programs held at the church must be the next step. Some theologian’s ideas or view points, and some strategy and creative ideas toward assimilation will be evaluated and practice in this research. This project will be used as a “spring-board” to use other creative ideas and models for assimilation and outreach ministry to reach the Liberian Community. The mandate of the church is to assimilate people of all nations. Roger L. Walton in his book, *Disciple Together* states, “God is the creator of all human beings,

³¹ Merriam- Webster Dictionary, “Theology,” accessed on March 12, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>.

³² Billy Graham, *Thirty Discipleship Exercises: The Pathway to Christian Maturity* (Minneapolis, MN: Evangelistic Association, 1992) 32.

with their differences- their colors, their races, and their religions. Be attentive: Every time you draw nearer to your neighbor, you draw nearer to God. . . Every time you go further from your neighbor, you go further from God.”³³ In the life of humanity, especially the followers of Jesus. The congregation should be inclusive to invite even the least, the outcast, the poor and the homeless to be part of the local church.

Theological Views on Small Groups

When making assimilation in small groups, those groups may be classified in theological terms. Walton states, “The small group is church. The small groups represent ecclesiae; in *ekklesia* is a source of renewal for the church. Small groups are a special expression of *koinonia*. The argument here is that the New Testament Churches were small groups and represented a primitive and pure ecclesial form.”³⁴ Early disciples began meeting in small groups in homes and other places to minister and encourage one another. They also ministered to new converts under the inspirations and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and the Church continued to grow in every town, village, and city. When small groups were well planned and structured, the members grew and developed their own faith to become supporting members. In the life of the church, assimilation must have rules to guide its members to strengthen them. As David Lowes Watson states in his book, *Accountable Discipleship*, “The spiritual and churchly pilgrimage of John Wesley made him especially suited to lead the early Methodist Societies into a practical

³³ Roger L. Walton, *Disciples Together, Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups* (Golden Lane, UK: SCM Press Invocates House, 2014), 138.

³⁴ Walton, 138.

understanding of what it meant to be a Christian in the World...His upbringing in the Church of England had instilled in him the importance of the Christian tradition.”³⁵

In a strategy of assimilation, Wesley’s class meeting is a good paradigm to be followed by the church today. In his model, the class meeting was a small group in which the faith of a new Christian and their relationship with God in Christ could also be shared in open fellowship to help comfort and strengthen their colleagues in their group. His message of assimilation to everyone alike was in simple and plain words, and that made his message of salvation interesting to his congregation especially the common and poor people. As an evangelist, Wesley was always in touch with the world by his itinerant preaching and understanding his ministry that met the needs of ordinary people. Assimilation may take many forms in various communities. Prayers and prayer meeting must be the starting point. The strategy of praying for the disciples (both present and the future) was the primary task of Jesus. Avery Willis Jr. in his book, *The Disciple’s*

Mission states:

John 17 depicts the model relationship in the Bible- the relationship between the Father and His Son- and the relationship between Christ and His disciples. Christ provided our model, first in His relationship with God and then in His relationships with those God gave Him. Jesus spoke about these relationships in His last prayer to the Father among His disciples the night before He was to die on the cross. These tender passages reveal His heart’s inner most feelings and purposes.³⁶

To be a Christian means we are the followers of Christ. Stephen Hance defined disciples and said;

³⁵ David L. Watson, *Accountable Discipleship: Handbook for Covenant Discipleship, Groups in the Congregation*, (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1984), 17.

³⁶ Avery T. Willis, Jr. *The Disciple’s Mission; Master Life Book Four* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 1999), 30.

To be a disciple is to be somebody who is committed first and foremost to serving Jesus, going where he goes, doing what he wants, being what he wants us to be... He made them to witness and be witnesses of his teaching, preaching, and healing the sick as well as freeing the oppressed from evil and demons... He talks with them about what he is doing, then sends them out to do the same- first the Twelve and then a larger group of seventy-two. He wants them to share in his ministry, not as bystanders but as participants. He wants them to train others as he has trained them...He tells His listeners, not to make converts, but to make disciples.”³⁷

In discipleship, the family is the heart and soul of discipleship. Before ministering to others, we must minister to self and family and offer discipline to the community.

Darlene Fozard Weaver in *Discipleship and the City* states;

Discipleship begins in the home or it doesn't begin at all... because all too often when we focus on the city, public life, and Social and political spheres, we forget the family... Prior to the Reformation, Christians created a two-tier system of Calibrate religious orders and everyone else. Fourth-Century Eastern Orthodox theologian John Chrysostom attempted to mediate this hierarchy of Monastic over domestic Spirituality by identifying the family as a “domestic Church,” a small-scale model of the Church itself, an idea that has enjoyed resurgence in the past two decades.”³⁸

In fulfilling the mission of the church, discipleship is the goal. The mission must be a priority by the church to every nation and to all people. Mission may be defined differently by various writers, based on their understanding and the type of mission.

Bruce Nicholls in his book, *In Work, Worship, and Witness*, said,

Mission is everything God sends his people, the Church into the World to do. It is the church obeying the words of Christ, ‘as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.’...The whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world... That the World-wide Anglican Communion has defined mission as five spheres of action, namely: Evangelism and Church planting, the pastoral care of new converts and teaching and training in discipleship, compassionate service to

³⁷ Stephen Hance, *Beyond Confirmation: Going for Growth in Your Christian Life* (Oxford, UK: Tyndale House Publishing Inc. 2003), 60-61.

³⁸ Darlene Fozard Weaver, *Discipleship, and the City*; (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 2007), 20-22.

all in need, promoting righteousness and Justice in Society, the care and sustainability of creation.”³⁹

In the mission of making disciples, prayer must be the spring board and the foundation of everything. Prayer is considered as a key in making disciples. It is important to listen to others as they pray, because in so doing valuable lessons can be obtained from them as well.

It is encouraging to note that after the disciples followed Jesus for more than two or three years, they still felt they could not pray. They told Him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Mark Batterson in *Draw the Circle: The (40) Days Prayer Challenge*, said, “I wonder if that is how the disciples felt when they heard Jesus pray. Jesus’ prayers were so different that the disciples felt like they’d never really prayed before. . . They didn’t say, ‘Lord teach us to preach. They didn’t say, ‘teach us to lead, ‘or even, Lord, teach us to be disciples. ‘These endeavors are noble. But they had one request: ‘Lord, teach us to pray.”⁴⁰ In as much as prayer changes things, listening to others as they pray is important because it helps to develop our own stronger prayer lives. We must ask God to teach us to pray so that our prayer will provide what we need for ministry, not what we want. In the process of discipleship and witnessing, we must always pray for Christians in other places where Christians are being constantly harassed and persecuted. During persecutions and executions, they continue to minister and to educate others.

Accordingly, Rev. Dr. Lancy Lobo in, *Witnessing in a Struggling Church*, says,

Christians take care of five percent of primary education, ten percent of all literacy and holistic health care, twenty-five percent of existing care of orphans

³⁹ Bruce Nicholls, *Work, Worship and Witness: Essays Dedicated to a Vision and a Visionary*. (Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 2003), 179-280.

⁴⁰ Mark Batterson, *Draw the Circle: The 40 Day Prayer Challenge*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 222.

and widows and thirty percent of all existing care of mentally and physically handicapped, leprosy patients, and victims of AIDS. About four million children graduate from Christian educational institutions every year. Even those who keep harassing Christians and leveling false charges against them rush to get their children admitted to a Christian institution...Why despite this good Samaritan's work are we Christians, being subjected to harassment and atrocities? ⁴¹

If the minority group of Christians in India will continue to minister and to do outreach to about seventy percent during persecution, we who have freedom of speech and religion must be able to do more.

Judy Gattis Smith in, *Joyful Teaching - Joyful Learning*, states,

We Christians have good news to share. God is life and love and order and joy, and Christians are the carriers of that good news. The life of God is breaking through into the world in astounding joy. When we experience this joy, it will manifest itself in behavior...We are called as teachers to get in touch with the reality of joy. We have the exciting challenge to reveal to our students the love of God as we know it now by responses of faith and joy. We can understand the joy of God by seeing joy in others through shining faces and beaming eyes, in nature, in music, through pain. We can create settings where this joy can find release.⁴²

In following Christ's commands to go and disciple the entire world, we are teaching His good news, joy, hope and love to everyone in our communities. Those whom we teach also witness and some become teachers that have passed on the model.

In disciples making, searching the scriptures is meaningful to all converts. It is clear in the life of the church that God's Holy Spirit speaks to us in the scriptures; therefore, John Wesley's primary resource was the scriptures. According to the General Board of Discipleship, Vital Congregations, Faithful Discipleship,

Faithful disciples find in daily reading of scriptures which will create new insights and strengths for their walk with Christ. The stories of people who put their trust in God are inspiring. The circumstances of each day can make any given verse

⁴¹ Lancy Lobo, *Witnessing in A Struggling Church*, India Catechetical Association (Bangalore India: St Paul's Press, 2004), 69.

⁴² Judy Gattis Smith, *Joyful Teaching- Joyful Learning* (Prescott, AZ: Educational Ministries Inc., 1994) 105.

come alive with new meaning. Many formats for daily scripture reading are now available. Through a daily lectionary, readers work their way gradually through the books of the Old and New Testaments and become familiar with whole stories rather than just verses or pieces of stories. The daily reading or singing of Psalms also helps people become familiar with their many avenues of approach to God.⁴³

The above quotation greatly contributes to the process of disciples making by bringing in people to worship. Those people will quickly experience the Holy Spirit, giving their testimonies through witnessing as beneficial to all worshippers. John Wesley believed that scriptures, reasoning, tradition and experience are the four-standing poles of UMC, or as we now refer to them in the UMC, the quadrilateral.

Assimilating people to follow Christ is about service, and this was how Jesus served in this ministry as He commanded all His servants to go and do likewise. This service takes many forms based on the gifts and the abilities of those called to serve. John P. Gilbert and Nancy C. Zoller illustrate this in, *Lay Speaking Ministry*,

Several years ago, a hurricane struck southern Florida. Teams of servant Christians rushed to Florida to assist. At one church a lay speaker announced that he was seeking others to go to Florida to help people recover and restore their lives. He asked for volunteers and asked them what they could provide for this special outreach effort. A plumber volunteered and said that he could help repair damaged water systems. Another offered the use of his truck to haul supplies. Then, Robert came forward. Robert is a quadriplegic who is confined to a motorized wheelchair and almost unable to speak. How could he go? What could he offer? In halting slurred speech, Robert told the group that he promised to pray for the team, individual by individual, until they returned. Each of the team members embraced Robert, tears blurring their vision. Later, members of the team reported on their many difficulties. When they were most weary and when they wanted most to give up on their efforts, they remembered Robert. They knew he was praying for them at that very moment. Undergirded by a sense of those prayers, they found new strength and resolve to serve those whose homes had been destroyed.⁴⁴

⁴³ Methodist Council of Bishops, *The General Board of Discipleship: Faithful Disciples* (Nashville, TN: General Press, 1990), 126.

⁴⁴ John P. Gilbert and Nancy C. Zoller, *Lay Speaking Ministry; Basic Course 1997-2000*, (Nashville TN: Discipleship Resources Editorial Offices, 1997-2000), 21.

The quote above showed that in assimilation, each person played a different part. To make assimilation successful we must define a well-planned strategy to reach the unreached with the Gospel. Not all have heard about the Gospel. God in Christ obligated all Christians to evangelize to all the people of the world.

To evangelize the Gospel appropriately, we must know the assumptions about reality, truth, and values. Jim Petersen in his book, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle* quoted Dr. Charles R. Taber, saying, “This emphasis on appropriate strategies in modern missions is highly encouraging. Using biblical strategies which take into accounts the ethnic distinctions, cultural differences and assumptions, the hearer holds about reality truth, and value which are essential.... All these observations are to maximize the fit of the Gospel presentation to the hearer’s need. In these quoted studies, the primary purpose is to understand People.”⁴⁵

More missionaries and shepherds are needed to continue the mission of the church to make more disciples. Christ Himself showed good examples of how He wants His sheep to be nurtured. In calling His disciples initially, He said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”⁴⁶ All of His promises are completely based on how He cares for His sheep. More shepherds are needed to continue His mission to feed and take care of His sheep. Timothy Z. Witmer in, *The Shepherd Leader* states, “Jesus’ concern for the ongoing care of His sheep was clearly seen as He walked through the cities and villages of Galilee. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed

⁴⁵ Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as Lifestyle: Preaching into Your World with the Gospel* (Colorado Spring, CO: Naves Press, 1980), 16-17.

⁴⁶ Matthew 4:19 The Bible Gateway, accessed on March 20, 2018, <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Matthew%204%3A19>

like sheep without a shepherd.”⁴⁷ He not only saw their condition and their need, but He saw the cause of the problem. Ezekiel and Jeremiah had connected the weakened condition of the Israelites with the failure of the elders to shepherd the flock. ‘It was not simply a human need that moved Jesus, but their predicament as a flock not properly led.’⁴⁸ His compassionate response was twofold. First, He commanded His disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into harvest.”⁴⁹ Second, His compassion led to action. He immediately authorized and sent His disciples to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ His mission was to become their commission. . . . The apostles were to be the foundation of the perpetual ministry that Jesus intended for His flock.⁵⁰

It is imperative that because of population increases, more laborers are needed in every city, town, and villages to make disciples. It is very easy for people to forget about serving God. Before the Israelites reached the promised land of Canaan, they began to worship a golden calf at the foot of the mountain. Moses was still on the mountaintop where he received the commandments from God. This project seeks to meet the goal of awakening of the forgotten Liberians in Bristol, Pennsylvania. Disciple making may not start with a hundred or more. Jesus’ preparation and empowerment model are best seen with the twelve disciples. He focused on the few disciples because He used that as the only way to encourage them. His plan and mission to change lives started with a few

⁴⁷ Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader; Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: R and R Publishing Co., 1995), 32-33.

⁴⁸ Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader; Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*, 32-33.

⁴⁹ Witmer, 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 33..

followers. To multiply and produce more disciples, we must start with few and motivate the few to pass it on.

Greg Ogden in *Transforming Discipleship* states, “Robert Coleman has written, “The best work is always done with a few. Better to give a year or so to one or two men who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going.”⁵¹ Robert Coleman’s comment encourages us to start with a few people and we will get more later. Jesus went about shaping and training His twelve disciples that they would be “fisher of men. “Jesus did not build a school to teach hundreds of students or more. He did not offer semester courses for the twelve to enroll or to give diplomas or certificates of apostleship. Discipleship is to follow His command, to know Jesus more, to love His teaching more and to believe in him more. His leadership development of his under-shepherds was to share his life from person to person, and from community to community.

Witnessing to a living faith in a disciple is essential and will surely encourage worshippers during the Eucharist. When the parish church or a congregation is packed to capacity with people who worship around the Eucharistic table, there is praying, and singing of religious hymns. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the converts listened to the celebrant and the people are challenged with the Gospel. The people partake of the Eucharistic bread and the command, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,” can be very motivating.

⁵¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 75.

The meaning is that the love of Jesus Christ given to each of us at the Eucharist table must be reproduced in our lives and in our relationship with each other. In this relationship, we must be concerned, and care for one another. Manuel Rebeiro in his book, *Called to Be a Witnessing Church* states: “We have come to see the goal of our priestly ministry as building Christian community. This community has two closely interrelated and inseparable dimensions: the vertical, by which it is a community of faith, praise and worship of God; and the horizontal, by which it is community of Love and Fellowship where the values of truth, freedom and justice prevail.”⁵² The believing community, a missionary or discipleship community opens to the entire world where it is situated. The aim of the missionary or discipleship community is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and in deed. Making disciples must fulfill the mission of Jesus’ ministry because He instructed the disciples to go and teach His commandment in the entire world.

Christians are the witnesses in disciple making from the very time they confessed Christ as our Lord and Savior. Christians witness in different ways during their journey in the Christian faith and through sharing of faith with others; they are winning people to Christ. Witnessing may vary in different settings depending on the culture of the people. Sharing a testimony with someone to win them to Christ may encourage that person especially if that person is familiar with what is being shared. In making disciples by assimilating the Liberian Community, we share that which we witnessed in the past especially during the civil crisis and difficult times in Liberia. We share how God saved

⁵² Manuel Rebeiro, *Called to be a Witnessing Church*, (Karala, India: Jyotir Dharma, Kala Massery, 2003), 45.

some of us from the gun shots, starvation, sicknesses, and things that could have killed us. Our vows and promises were turning to God in worship and encouraging others that God saved us. We must remember God's words, "turn to me and I will turn to you," as our guide.

In assimilating people into the church, witness flows from being in Christ than that of being in the outside world. As witnesses to Christ through everyday action in words and deeds, it allows us to win others to Christ. Accordingly, Jerry Wiles in *How to Win Others to Christ* states, "Are you a Christian Witness?" The answer is most assuredly, "Yes": you are a Christian twenty-four hours a day, every day, no matter where you are or in what circumstances you may find yourself...However, if someone ask you, 'Have you gone soul winning lately?' your answer will be 'yes or no' based on how recently you engaged in active soul winning."⁵³ Christians are commissioned to make disciples everywhere, so soul are won no matter where, when or how. We must call the people and minister to them, and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. One way of winning people to Christ is by turning the conversation toward the Gospel. To make an approach and discern what the Lord is doing in the life of people, we open conversations for everyone to participate in a group, that we are making disciples of those that we are inviting or winning to Christ. Winning people to the community of faith, the ministry of Jesus Christ may begin with one person and grow into a team or a community. Understanding discipleship and evangelism, it is not only done by an individual but by a

⁵³ Jerry Wiles, *How to Win Others to Christ: Your Personal Practical Guide to Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 50.

team and witnessing communities as well. We also encourage and strengthen those that have known Christ, but due to circumstances have backslide.

Using gifts and graces to bring people to Christ, Rick Richardson, Terry Erickson and Judy Johnson in *Reimagining Evangelism* state,

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of services, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ⁵⁴

In the process of inviting people to the faith, we must encourage others by practicing and sharing the good news to all. We must invite all people to commit themselves to Christ and be participants in every community. We want to follow friendship and discipleship in evangelism.

The Master commissioned us to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that He commanded us.”⁵⁵ When Philip tells Nathanael “Come and see” (John 1:46), he sets forth an excellent way to introduce people to Christ. Floyd Schneider says,

When John the Baptist told two of his disciples that Jesus was the Lamb of God, they asked Jesus where he lived. He told them, ‘come and see.’ He didn’t whip out the Old Testament and prove to them on the spot that he was the messiah. For three years, Jesus demonstrated His Messiahship through His actions. The disciple came to faith in Christ by observing day and night for two to three years, how He

⁵⁴ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 14.

⁵⁵ Matthew 28:18-20

lived as a human being. . . We learn to evangelize by watching Him do it in everyday situations.⁵⁶

He visited people, those that were willing to believe and to follow Him. He served His disciples and spent times with the lower class of people. At some point, He became involved in their lives before He taught them His will. We must show concern for our neighbors and be involved in their lives and this will prepare them to receive Jesus' message. For some, they will be open to the Gospel only if we are involved in their lives. Sometimes we need to be interested in something that they are interested in before we can win them to Christ. Making disciples that they may join us to become part of the worshipping community is the main goal.

Following Christ's example is the goal as we make disciples to the Liberian Community. His invitation was that everyone who had a heavy load must come to Him and He will give them rest. Everyone who was hungry and thirsty would come for drinks and foods that they may drink and be feed. We must show our concern about the wellbeing of people before they can be convinced to follow the community of faith. When we tell people about Christ, they want to see if we will live the example of Christ. According to Randy Newman in *Questioning Evangelism*,

If we're to incarnate the Gospel with our lives as well as communicate it with our words, we must be liberated from contempt and anger, and be transformed by grace and love. For that transformation to occur, asking God to bring it about is crucial. But we can also contribute to the process by reflecting on some great examples. The supreme role model is our Lord Himself. 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. This was a strong emotional response. Some people would say that the test implies a physical reaction as well. 'Do we see people as Jesus does? Do we

⁵⁶ Floyd Schneider, *Evangelism for the Fainthearted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal's Publications, 2004), 27.

get beyond their veneer of success, wealth, laughter, confidence, or positive mental attitude?⁵⁷

We identify with people especially during their difficult and suffering times and pray with them if they allow us. In disciple making, we must pray always to share Jesus with confidence to everyone in the community. We must always pray because God promised us that when we pray, the Lord provides, and the Holy Spirit empowers His People to be brave.

Believing in the promises of God, we can share God's words with confidence. As we witness for Christ, we claim God promises for God's people and the church. The church may focus on programs or traditions more than anything else. The church may be driven by theology that focuses only on God which shapes the understanding of the members. The church may also focus on growing its membership and nothing else. These dynamics are important in the life of the church and worship, but the church must prioritize its mission.

Evangelism and discipleship are incomplete unless the church fulfills its goal in an ever-growing world. Tim Wright made it clear when he wrote:

Mission-driven congregations are impassioned about reaching people who do not have a relationship with God and known Jesus as Savior. They see their purpose as connecting with people and helping them become disciples of Jesus Christ. Reaching the unreached set the agenda for their ministries. This happens...through their members. The members passionately believe that the church exists for others yet to be reached...They find significant peace of mind for the fact that through their church, they are also doing mission.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Randy Newman, *Questioning- Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal's Publications, 2004), 214.

⁵⁸ Tim Wright, *Unfinished Evangelism; More than Getting Them in the Door* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995), 39.

The discipleship must continue in the life of the church to involve everyone who is in need in the community.

Studia Missionalia states:

Evangelization has been understood both narrowly and broadly. Narrowly, it refers specifically to announcing the good news to those who do not believe. In a broad sense, it has come to mean everything that brings human life and the World under the same way of God. Specifically, this would include bringing the influence of the Gospel on education, pastoral care, and social action. Another useful distinction is to refer to three ways of evangelizing: First, the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it, second, the pastoral care and religious maturation of believers, sometimes referred to as ‘continual evangelization,’ and third, the rekindling of faith in those who have fallen away.⁵⁹

Evangelizing the church is one thing, and the process of disciple-making is another thing. Bringing the people in the door without encouraging them or nurturing them and helping them to grow to maturity is another thing. The statement, “Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, and feed my sheep”⁶⁰ referred to bringing people in, taking care of them and helping them to grow to maturity and then sending these people to make disciples as well. The church is therefore challenged to respond to society and culture as God’s creatures. It may happen that baptized members may have lost their faith and no longer consider themselves members of any church or their home church. We must disciple, nurture and bring those people back to the church. Often making disciples and witnessing may appear slow to be successful, but sometimes a challenge becomes an opportunity and an opportunity becomes a challenge, but we must work with faith.

⁵⁹ Donna Orsuto, *Witness and Sanctity at the Heart of all Evangelization* (Pilotta, Roma: Gregorian Biblical Press, 2012), 88.

⁶⁰ John Chapter 21.

Looking at the Christian Church from its beginning, the persecutions of the early Christians and their continuing ministering, and the proclamations of the Gospel were witnessed by the new converts. The seeds planted by the first and early martyrs including Stephen still led to the growth of the church. During persecutions and executions, God's Holy Spirit continued to strengthen the apostles to proclaim the Gospel from village to village and from city to city. The seeds planted in Jerusalem at the beginning of the church by twelve disciples are now bearing fruits around the entire world. Disciple making is a seed planting that may continue to grow in many years to come. In disciple making, the Holy Spirit will work on the heart and mind of the new Christians. We must minister to people through visitation, invitation and welcoming and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

We can only make decisions to follow God's way when the Holy Spirit opens our minds through telling our stories to one another individual. It is important to understand that taking the church outside the wall to the unreached is part of evangelism and discipleship. Bringing in people through outreach ministries is one thing but keeping those that come in is another thing. Many of those that come in do not stay; either their lives were not transformed, or they were not inspired by the style of worship. It is essential that the leaders or pastor examine carefully both the traditional and the contemporary services to see where congregants are most comfortable with the worship experience. We must understand that there are people who grew up in the church and those who do not have difference perspective on these worship services.

Martha Grace Reese in *Unbinding the Gospel*, says, "So let's try to listen to what some new members of our Churches are saying. Don't change a thing you are doing.

Your worship, your classes may be exactly right for the people God is calling you to reach. For now, let's simply try to hear what a few members are saying.”⁶¹ From Martha's statement, we must wonder about several questions to ask our new members, visitors or people who did not grow up in churches. Why do most first-time visitors quickly join the church? Why must visitors delay joining the church? Why is it that many newcomers delay taking part in the church services? If we ask ourselves some of these questions and do a worship survey, we will understand that the attendees between the ages of twenty to thirty, may not be comfortable with that of fifty to sixty years old congregants. It is important that the church listen to the members, both young and old, to get their views. If the church must fulfill its mission to change the world, it must start to change the community, the people, or the city. As disciples in disciple-making, we must look at the church in a new form and adapt the new forms of worship among the young and old generations. We must always look at the church in new images of mission and these images must be undertaken by the church to continue to fulfill the mission of the church. Stanley H. Skreslet cited David Bosch in his book, *Picturing Christian Witness*, that, “Mission must be understood and undertaken in an imaginatively new manner today.”⁶²

According to Bosch, “the church is being driven to generate new forms of mission imagery now because it faces a profoundly challenging contemporary crisis. From all sides the Christian mission is under attack, even from within its own ranks, a fact that

⁶¹ Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 75.

⁶² Stanley H. Skreslet, *Picturing Christian Witness: New Testament Images of Discipleship in Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 15.

makes it necessary to find an entirely new image today. That the time of testing confronting the church at the turn of the twenty-first century has brought with it a confusing season of uncertainty.”⁶³ In the continuing effort of mission and discipleship, it is crucial that the church creates more efforts to identify new images of mission, especially in a multi-cultural community.

Harry L. Poe, in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century*, states, “Discipleship will not improve by making the demands of Christianity more vigorous in the presentation of the gospel. Rather, discipleship will grow increasingly more prevalent as we give more attention to the gracious benefits of Christ in the gospel. Christ alone supplies sufficient motive to follow Christ.”⁶⁴ He laid the foundation and gave example for us to follow as believers that we have to pray and be persistence to fulfill His command. We have a goal to fulfill the mission of the church through discipleship. We will do discipleship through outreach ministry to reach everyone, the have-not, the poor, the hungry and the outcast as well.

Sterling W. Huston states, “The Biblical strategy for fulfilling the “Great Commission,” mandate has always been for the church to ‘go’ to those who have not heard the Good News. Jesus said, ‘go and make’ - go ye into the entire World’ - so send I you’ to the utter most parts of the earth.’ The early church went out and proclaimed the

⁶³ Skreslet, 15.

⁶⁴ Harry L. Poe, *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century: The Critical Issues* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publisher, 1989), 143.

Gospel wherever they could get a hearing-in homes, Synagogues, market places, public forums, prison, everywhere.”⁶⁵

It is our mission to call the community to witness and imitate the early Christians. Andrew R. H. Thompson in *Edinburgh 2010 Mission Today and Tomorrow* said, “We are called to discern how to proclaim Christ’s lordship in a way that is meaningful to a pluralist World, the same way the First Christians discerned how to proclaim it in new and different context.”⁶⁶

In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren asserts, “At Saddleback, our definition of worship is ‘worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He’s said, and what He’s doing.’”⁶⁷ Getting everyone involve in worshipping God is the mandate of the Master for the mission of the church. Rick Warren also said, “Your preferred style of worship says more about your cultural background than your theology’ . . .’In genuine worship God’s presence is felt, God’s pardon is offered, God’s purposes are revealed, and God’s power is displayed.”⁶⁸

Fernendo Enns in *Violence and Christian Spirituality* states, “The worshipping community provides the soil in which *koinonia* is nurtured. . . At the same time, the community is the place for spiritual encouragement and comfort.

⁶⁵ Sterling W. Huston, *Crusade Evangelism and the Local Church*, (Minneapolis, MN: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Wide Publications, 1984), 116.

⁶⁶ Andrew R. H. Thompson, *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International Oxford Center for Mission, 2011), 276.

⁶⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church, Growth Without Compromising, Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 240.

⁶⁸ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church, Growth Without Compromising, Your Message and Mission*, 240.

This conception of participation and sharing with one another in a concrete place corresponds to the concept of *koinonia* in the New Testament'... from the community's experience of engagement in discipleship and the community of the faith community."⁶⁹

To make disciples, we are forming a team in the community to reach the others with the gospel. Warren encourages us with other strategies, we must first reach those whom we have thing in common with before going on the outside to make more disciples.

Beginning with our families and relatives is the spring-board before going to our neighbors. We then extend our disciple-making to our co-workers and those whom we can easily reach in the community in shopping centers, grocery stores and other public places.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mission of assimilating the Liberian Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol, Pennsylvania is the focus of the doctoral project. It is crucial to evangelize the church but that alone is not enough. Assimilation is done by bringing people into the door and nurturing them, helping them to grow to maturity in their Christian faith. Sending those mature Christians out to seek other disciples is a continuous process in fulfilling the mission of the church. As said earlier, assimilation and growth also occur in small group ministry, people witness and learn quicker in small group by listening to one another's stories. Participants in small groups engage in the

⁶⁹ Fernando Enns, *Violence and Christian Spirituality and Ecumenical Conversation* (Brookline, MA: World Council of Churches Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 246.

learning process through answering questions and listening to questions from group members through witnessing.

Evangelism is not the same as discipleship as some may conclude. Evangelism may be the proclaiming of the gospel and discipleship is more than proclaiming the gospel. Discipleship in this light demands us to take up our cross and follow Christ daily. The main concept of this project is to fish for people in the Liberian community that are forgetting about their origin. During this project, we want to use the fishing net that Jesus mentioned in His early ministry, “I will make you fish for man.” Assimilating is considered a net not just a net, but a net within a net. As a church, the goal is to grow and produce more disciples who are willing to transform the world as Christ’s followers.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This theoretical framework aims at providing resourceful empirical and theoretical means of welcoming and nurturing the Liberian Community. The congregation seeks to assimilate them into the fold of Christian community by proposing various ways of incorporating them in the church. It is not another alternative strategy that attempts to replace the existing works of the government, organization and civil societies. Rather it is designed to complement them by encouraging the involvement of the church in accepting the immigrants so that they can be fully assimilated into First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania.

P. J. Staudenraus in “Victims of the African Slave Trade” explains that “The genesis of the Liberian civil disruption dated back to the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS). This society is a Christian philanthropic organization established to facilitate the repatriation of freed slaves of Africa. It sent eighty-six Americo-Liberians back to their homeland. These eighty-six former US slaves who were sent from America by the ACS in 1820 founded the republic in 1847. This minority controlled the republic for the following 133 years.¹

¹P. J. Staudenraus, “Victims of the African Slave Trade, A Document,” *Journal of Negro History* 41, No. 2 (1956): 148–151.

Solomon M. Muin states, “Interestingly, the coming of the former slave sealed the migration of people in search of a land, and space was declared Liberia in 1847. As a melting pot of culture each of the tribes along with the former slaves begun assimilating the various cultures. The Americo-Liberians were small in number, but their American cultural influence and strategies played a role as the dominant culture since they led government with absolute control. The assimilation process was to the disadvantage of the indigenous tribes as they faced structural and cultural violence from the system of the Americo-Liberians.²

During this 133-year reign of the Americo-Liberians at the exclusion of the indigenous, the nation suffered under the hands of this minority Americo-Liberians. They perpetuated a class system for their own benefits. The government at times forcibly seized their lands and properties under the condition of the indigenous becoming civilized before their properties returned. This brought serious cultural and identity crisis. Muin continues: “Native sons and daughters were sent to live with Americo-Liberian families, and or sent to missionaries' boarding schools to be ‘educated and civilized.’ This process made several indigenous children lose their cultural identity and most time their family roots. Christianity impacted the life of the native as well. Families converted to Christianity would at times distance themselves from their cultural practices, which they would regard as sinful or satanic. Indigenous children living with Americo-Liberians or

² Solomon M. Muin (2016), *The Role of Liberian Community Organizations in the Integration of Liberian Immigrants: A Case Study of Immigrants in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, SIT Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad SIT Digital Collections, 8.

converted to Christianity faced names changed to Christian names and tribal languages mostly prohibited in homes of Americo-Liberians except for English.³

Influenced by the Pan-Africa movement and the civil rights movement in America, indigenous Liberian students in America started to search for a process of identity for belonging. But as expected, by the 1970s, decades of increasing wealth, development and power structure of the, “Americo-Liberians began to crumble. After that progressive movements were formed in the United States the first uprising in Liberia began on April 14, 1979. This was an historic moment as Liberian students who had returned to Liberia opposed the price hike commodities in their country. This culminated in a coup led by an indigenous Liberian, Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe.

In 1989, Charles Taylor, an Americo-Liberian, invaded Nimba County with the help of National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) reclaiming Liberia again in 1990 except for Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. This was followed by fourteen to sixteen years of brutal civil war that claimed more than 150,000 lives and displaced 850,000 more across West Africa and around the world. In August of 2003 the war came to an end. After the signing of the peace agreement between the two groups in the fall of 2005, the first female president of Africa was elected on January 16, 2006.⁴

Before 1980, Liberians entered America just for business, tourism, student, and exchange visitation. The majority the returned after their pursuit was over. But latter there two major shifts in Liberia greatly impacted the influx of migration. One was the

³ Muin, 9.

⁴ Serena Chaudhry, “Coming Home: Connecting Older Liberians in the Diaspora with the Family and Friends at Home,” *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 25, no. 1 (2008), accessed May 21, 2017, <http://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/21398>.

overthrow of Americo-Liberian government in 1980. The second major change was the fourteen years of civil war, which started in 1990. As a result, there was increasing migration of Liberians to the US. Latter this led to the new classification of Liberian immigration status as an immigrant, asylum, and refugees. The primary reason for the mass exodus of Liberian to United States was said to be a search of a place to meet essential human needs, as Liberia could not provide such satisfaction.⁵

Below is the figure of Liberian immigration to the United States as estimated by Ciata Victor of *TLC Africa Magazine*: “From the year 1925 to 1929, Liberians who immigrated to the United States were 27. Progression in the number of immigrants begins to rise. By the 1950s, a significant jump from 27 to 232 immigrants was seen. However, it was not until the last decade of the twentieth century that witnessed significant immigration of Liberians to America. Between 1990 and 2003, the population of Liberians in the United States jumped to 99,607 though the UNHCR has it at 110,589.⁶ This is how many Liberians came to United States and settled. Now we will look at the cord that binds Liberia and United States.

The diplomatic relationship between Liberia and the United States of America can be traced back to over 150 years when Liberia was founded by returning African freed slaves. Therefore, it is so crucial to understand the relationship between Liberia and America. Roland P. Falkner correctly puts it. “To understand aright the newly awakened interest in the affairs of the Republic of Liberia we must recount with some detail the

⁵Victor, Ciata *TLC Magazine* (2004) *Statistic of West African Immigrants in America*, accessed May 21, 2017, Retrieved from www.tlcafrica.com/Liberian_statistics1.htm.

⁶ Muin, 12.

more than half-forgotten history of the relations existing between the people and the Government of the United States and the African commonwealth. Such a recital will bring to light some rather unique colonial and international relations, and will, we believe, show the present concern of the United States with the welfare of Liberia to be no gratuitous meddling, but the revival⁷ of a deep and fundamental interest which though generally dormant has been for nearly a century one of our political traditions.⁸

Liberia was born out of the philanthropic act of the Southern States; it is not the product of the anti-slavery reaction that took place many years after in the Northern States. In fact, this colony came to existence because of the efforts of the American government to suppress the importation of slaves. Some of the notable people who to free blacks to Liberia included Henry Clay, and Francis Scott Key, Bushrod Washington, and the architect of the U.S. Capitol, William Thornton.

During the fiercer struggle of later years, the colonization idea appears as an olive branch held out by men of milder temperament to the more eager combatants on both sides of the contest. After the final appeal to arms, and the settlement of the question once and for all, the people of the United States forgot Liberia, and the relatively few at best who had sought the welfare of the negro in his original home, turned their thoughts to other problems which confronted the reunited nation. But Liberia has not forgotten the land of its origin and has repeatedly pleaded with the United States for sympathy and

⁷ Serena Chaudhry, "Coming Home: Connecting Older Liberians in the Diaspora with the Family and Friends at Home," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 25, no. 1 (2008).

⁸ Roland P. Falkner, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Jul., 1910), pp. 529-545 Published by: American Society of International Law, accessed, May 21, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i311973?loggedin=true>

support. Nor have these ever been denied, a fact, which in the present juncture of affairs encourages her in the hope that they may be extended in even greater measure.⁹

Assimilation and culturalism are two different opposing approaches. The contrasts between them are often given comparative analysis in France (assimilation) and Great Britain (multiculturalism). Let us first describe the meaning of these two to see the distinction more vividly. Assimilation of cultural, religion, sociality or politics is not exclusively one-sided. Both the host countries and the immigrants greatly influence one another though some are more easily assimilated to the dominant culture where they are migrated to it takes time for other immigrants. Likewise, the degree of assimilation may differ based on the nations or communities. Pew Research Center reveals that 43 percent in 2013 fears that immigrants threaten traditional American values. Fifty-two percent believes that an immigrant strengthens the culture and society of the America.¹⁰ It means there are chances that assimilation can be times mutual. Assimilation primarily involves absorption, integration and acculturation of the dominant society or culture as a result the assimilated society or members is indistinguishable from the host region's culture. Assimilation in anthropology and sociology the process whereby an individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant of a society. The process of assimilating involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the

⁹ Falkner, 529-545.

¹⁰ The Integration of Immigrants into American Society, "*The Integration of American Society*" (n.d) retrieved from, accessed on May 26, 2017, "<https://www.nap.edu/read/21746/chapter/9>" \l "chapter07_AAif"

assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society.¹¹

According to sociologist, there are two commonly distinguished forms of assimilation: forced assimilation and unforced assimilation. In forced assimilation, a person or group is compelled to take on the practices of another culture, such as by adopting that culture's language and religious traditions. In unforced assimilation, a person takes on the practices of another culture but is not forcibly compelled to do so. Sociologists use the concept of assimilation to describe one way a person or group of a culture (such as immigrants) might respond to or blend with another culture, or how a minority cultural group might relate to a dominant cultural group.¹² There are some aspects of assimilation that does not often affect or influence even though it is forced and unforced. Although assimilation can be compelled through force or undertaken voluntarily, it is rare for a minority group to replace its previous cultural practices completely; religion, food preferences, proxemics (e.g., the physical distance between people in each social situation), and aesthetics are among the characteristics that tend to be most resistant to change. Assimilation does not denote “racial” or biological fusion, though such fusion may occur.¹³

In multiculturalism as a result of immigration many societies *and* cultural backgrounds come to live together in a diverse society in other words, they become

¹¹ Elizabeth Prine Pauls, *Assimilation*. (n.d) Retrieved from Britannica, accessed on May, 26, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/assimilation-society>.

¹² Chegg: *Study*, (n.d), accessed on May 26, 2017, "<http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/assimilation-46>"

¹³ Pauls, *Assimilation*.

culturally plural. Very often they form cultural groups of unequal power, numerically, economically, or politically. These power differences have given rise to popular and social science terms such as “mainstream”, “minority”, “ethnic group” etc.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, assimilation may involve voluntary or forced absorption, including social exposure to even cruel re-education and unlearning. It is also accomplished through education, social activities, and involvement in mainstream culture. Some of the extreme forms of assimilation may include dominating the culture of the minority, imperialism or colonialism, slavery, or forced proselytization. There are other synonymous terms of assimilation, which we will not discuss in detail. They include “aculturalism”, “inculturation” and “enculturalism.” A very simple definition of aculturalism as given by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits says, that “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”.¹⁵ Clanet defines inculturation as, “The set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when they identify themselves as culturally distinct”¹⁶

¹⁴John W. Berry, (1997) *Lead Article: Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*. Applied Psychology: An International Review (Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada)46 (1).8

¹⁵ R. Redfield, R. Linton, & M. Herskovits, (1936) *Memorandum on the study of acculturation*. *American Anthropologist*. 38. 149

¹⁶ C. Clanet, (1990) *L’interculturel: Introduction aux approches interculturelles en éducation et en sciences humaines*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail. 70

Effect of Philosophy in Cultural Assimilation

Cultural and philosophical assimilation usually take place in the history due to extensive and prolong migration, Christianization, proselytization. Buddhism is thought to have assimilated with other religious philosophies. In her book, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: "The Historical Development of the Honji-Suijaku Theory*, Alicia Matsunaga expounded the theory of *Honji-Suijaku*, based on the multicultural activities in India, China and Japan. She proposes that Honji-Suijaku is merely an expression of a Buddhist Philosophy of association, which commenced with the first dawning of Buddhist thought.¹⁷ As a case study, we can take the Polynesian philosophy and culture. Polynesians' philosophy emphasizes knowledge. As Aaron Hire writes: "Central to Polynesian culture and philosophy is the quest for knowledge and the respect people hold towards those who have knowledge and are of high social status. The Polynesian cultures have knowledge that is portrayed through stories, mottoes, lessons, myths, chants, and rituals. Many Polynesians will not consider someone else *truly* Polynesian if they are not able to attain and share this type of knowledge."¹⁸

Any Polynesian, not able to speak his or her cultural language, ignorant of one's family story, oral traditional myths, and ritualistic traditions is considered uneducated and illiterate. Such knowledge is very crucial. For example, Hawaiian culture is broadly based on the formation of its early educational system. John Charlot writes about Hawaiian schools, "Schools were established, based on the model of the family, with

¹⁷ Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: The Historical Development of the Honji-Suijaku Theory*, (USA): Tuttle (Charles E.) Co Inc., 1970)

¹⁸ Aaron Hire, "I'm Polynesian Too: Philosophy of Assimilation, Cosmopolitanism, Colonialism, Race, & Culture" (2012). *Senior Theses*. Paper 5. 23

their own lineages of teachers, craft gods, literature, and ceremonies”¹⁹ Every person in the family is responsible to educate one another. Family itself is the place where cultural and philosophical lessons are formed. Charlot continues, “Knowledge was therefore power on every level of human activity a power that could seem godly and magical to the ignorant.”²⁰ But how does this philosophy affect assimilation? The zeal for knowledge has its disadvantages and advantages: on the one hand, it adapts other culture and practices quickly but on the other hand, it can easily infiltrate once culture with dominant culture and possibly lost its uniqueness at the end.

Aaron Hire points out the outcome of this philosophy. He said: “However, the Polynesian interest in foreign customs and knowledge combined with the Polynesian philosophy of hospitality were huge factors that allowed for easy infiltration of Western culture into Polynesia because foreign influence eventually came to dominate the politics and well-being of Polynesia. With the arrival of capitalism, Polynesians gained new political, economic and cultural values and realized too late that the adopted values had tampered with their traditional ones. The overzealous philosophies of control and power that the United States had in colonial times took advantage of the Polynesian Philosophies and in turn allowed for control over Polynesia.”²¹

Hire continues, “The Polynesian philosophies of conduct and behavior may be seen as a way of creating the “appropriate” or desired personality, but the Polynesian education system gave importance to imitation, observation, curiosity, memory,

¹⁹ John Charlot, *Classical Polynesian Thinking*. Writing in: A Companion to World Philosophies. Malden, Massachusetts. Blackwell publishers Ltd. 1997, 1999. 50

²⁰ Charlot, 50.

²¹ Hire, 24-25.

competition, and speediness to learn which made these traits useful and common to have in Polynesian culture.”²²

If the church wants to see fruits and effectively assimilate the estranged community back to the fold, she needs to thoroughly study and understand the victims’ painful stories and try to view the problem from the perspectives of the victims. Just as understanding the historical background of the establishment of Liberia is crucial to those who want to extend their helping hands, awareness of the major stigma the Liberians faced and are currently facing would enlighten and inspire them. Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate the prevailing issues unique to the Liberians of America. The idea ‘once refugees arrived in America the struggles faced by refugees would be over is a myth. However, it is known today that Refugees and immigrants, especially, are faced with countless barriers even after their arrival in America.’²³

Language barrier: Though English is the common language of Liberia; only 20 percent living in urban speak English. This being the fact when the immigrants arrive, where only English is a means of communication, this is going to be the toughest barrier they will face. Sometimes the American whose language is spoken all over the world does not truly realize how hard it is for the foreigners to learn English. Without it they cannot work; without it they cannot buy; without it they cannot make friends. These are everybody’s basic needs for a person to settle and grow in a new country. To solve this issue, it becomes mandatory to learn English. Language is most probably the biggest

²² Hire, 28.

²³ Three of them are listed below. The top ten barriers are compiled and listed below. The first seven are taken from Christina Nunez’s article, the 7 Biggest Challenges’ facing refugees and Immigrants in US with slight modification. Christina Nunez, accessed on May 24, 2017, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/the-7-biggest-challenges-facing-refugees-and-immig/>,

barrier the Liberian immigrants face. The Church must find a way to get involve in discipling these refugees so that they can not only work and communicate with others but be part of the Christian community in worship and interaction.

Raising children: Another major barrier is the question of how to raise the children and help them succeed in a new, unfamiliar culture where they must learn everything from the beginning. And it is reasonably said to be one of the very common concern the parents of the refugees have in America. Parents are more concern about the way their children are influenced by American culture than the school grade of their children. As usual most children quickly pick up this new language and so these refugees are often easily “Americanized,” but may be at odds with their own African culture.

Cultural barriers: Cultural barrier requires in-depth discussion and needs extra space and time. There are numerous challenges the Liberian refugees must overcome or endure. Solomon M. Muin describes its accurately: Migration of individuals from one culture to another does not go without challenges. The underlying consequences of this massive migration of Liberians into the United States are the cultural, identity, socio-economic, and psychological challenges impacting the lives of the people. Though adapting to the new way of life is not strange to Liberians since Liberians have been going through cultural, and identity transformation from the foundation of Liberia, adaptation in a foreign land with dominant culture influences bring several challenges. These problems are those this research seeks to study through the perspective of Liberians and community organizations that are involved in helping Liberian integrate.²⁴

²⁴ Muin, Institute/SIT Study Abroad SIT Digital Collections 14.

Liberia ethnic groups are known for their collective rather than individual artwork. Important to tribal groups are the folklores, parables, and proverbs of Liberia. The Liberians' way of parenting is a strange culture in America. They follow extended family structure rather than nuclear family structure. For instance, in the village, as well as in the refugee camp, children are given more independence. They are left unattended by individual parents, while attended by any other adults. The typical Liberian families usually are comprised of about ten persons living in two to three bedrooms.

This necessitates some to always look after the family. Some parenting methods that are different from American culture include the following²⁵: *Assumption of shared responsibility by anyone else in the family*. This type of parenting is typical of many tribal cultures. Americans may take this as irresponsibility. Often parenting duties are shared by the older family members in the household. The older children, either male or female but usually female, would have to share the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings. It is acceptable in the Liberian Communities to send your children to live with other relatives, or friends. The assumption of shared parenting includes sending a child to another relative to live and study for years even though the children have their own parents.

Physical and mental health: The prolonged periods of flight as refugees and the camp life are causes for many other diseases. Lack of sanitation and health care center also bring treatable ailments to the immigrants. As treatment requires finance, this refugee and immigrants face another financial barrier due to sickness. And those of them

²⁵Susan Schmidt (Revised 2011), *Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers* (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children Service), 6-7

who had experienced violence and had witnessed bloodshed due to war when they were in Liberia must still be feeling the anxiety. Thus, it is reported that after the arrival some are found with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Rape during the war is a very common strategy of the enemies. People who have experience such pangs in their flight will still suffer the mental and emotional stigma for being a rape victim. Certainly, there must be unwanted pregnancies resulting from rape and children born out of wedlock. These painful experiences would continue to haunt many for life.

Identity Crisis: In *the Role of Liberian Community Organizations in the Integration of Liberian Immigrants: A Case Study of Immigrants in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, Muin writes: “Liberia is one of the countries unique to the experience of cultural, social, psychological, and identity crisis. Since the founding of the nation, identity crisis continues to plague Liberians. The people continue to go through processes of integration from one culture to another, a shift that continues to cause challenges on the youth population.”²⁶

Anita and Benjamin Dennis’s book, *Slaves to Racism: “An Unbroken Chain from America to Liberia extensively discusses the better attitude among Liberians and gives us a fair idea of their identity crisis.* It perfectly reflects how the native Liberians generally consider the Americo-Liberians. Who are they? Have they become Americans or are they still Africans? They called the Americo-Liberians, ‘those rejected by both the whites in America and blacks in Africa.’ Those rejected by whites, rejected the whites caught between two very different cultures, the Americo-Liberians didn’t belong anywhere with

no genuine place or roots on either continents, they were outsiders in America and Liberia.’

‘The Africans they could easily become, they didn’t want. They were in Africa, but they were loyal to anything but Africa. The White Americans they could not be, since they could not be racially white, being culturally white was the next best thing. They were Americans seeking liberties and opportunities denied them in their “homeland.”²⁷ This alleged some Liberians themselves who reside in America have denied racism. They claim that the whites equally treat them. But from history and testimonies of various immigrants in America one can conclusively say that there is certainly sporadic mistreatment of the migrants by the whites even now. The above quotation reflects struggle of the Liberians and it reveals how the Liberians living in America encounter must be facing some kinds of racism. In that case, the Liberians are strangers in both the continents; while they are treated by the white as black refugees, descended from former slaves, they are considered by their own countrymen as pseudo-Africans in Liberia. If this identity crisis is true, it must provoke the Church to rethink her responsibilities toward this community who are striving to survive in the strange pond of indifference and apathetic society where they belong. The Church has a big obligation to disciple and brings them in the community of true worship and oneness in Christ.

The new arrivals to the United States joined a Liberian Community that numbered well over 39,000 in 2004. In addition to the Liberian refugees who arrived in the early 1990’s the community is made up of thousands of Liberians who were already in the

²⁷ Benjamin G. Dennis and Anita K. Dennis, *Slaves to Racism: Racism’s Impact on National Character in America to Liberia* (New York: Algora Pub, 2008). 11

United States, mostly as students, businesspeople, and visitors, when the civil war broke out. Many were granted temporary asylum and eventually permanent residency in the United States. Many of these Liberians have gone on to contribute to their communities as doctors, nurses, educators, businesspeople, religious leaders, and social service providers.

Because of their background experiences in Liberia and in the refugee camps, Donald A. Ranard states: “Recent arrivals have encountered greater challenges in the United States than have previous Liberian refugees. A particularly thorny issue facing resettlement workers is the many Liberian families headed by single women. Another issue of concern is the number of young Liberian teenagers who have become the primary caregivers for their younger siblings. Yet despite these challenges, we can expect that with help from their families, friends, and service providers, the new arrivals will survive the hardships of resettlement and go on to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.²⁸

According to Bridging Refugee Youth & Children’s Service (BRYCS) other characteristics of this more recent wave of Liberian refugees may include the following: A prolonged refugee experience, often on the run for more than a decade. “Dual flight”, meaning that they have had to flee their place of refuge two, three or more times, leading to a prolonged experience of insecurity and upheaval. Those coming out of refugee camps in the Ivory Coast may also have a sense of betrayal by those they trusted, since

²⁸ Donald A. Ranard ed. (2015) *Liberians: An Introduction to their History and Culture* Published by the Center for Applied Linguistics, 19, 1

Liberian refugees were initially accepted in Ivory Coast and then targeted during that country's surge of violence in 2002.

They also have limited exposure to formal education. Many adults have come originally from rural areas and their children have only attended school within a refugee camp context, which typically does not extend beyond primary schooling, if there are a high number of single parent families, headed by either men or women. Due to factor such as death, fight, and instability and break own in social structure. Many Liberian families coming out of refugee camps have only one parent. It is essential that there be more rapid processing of refugees overseas, due to safety and vulnerability concerns. This has led to the resettlement of some extended family units, or guardianship arrangements, in which members were reunified only briefly before resettlement and may not be used to living together.²⁹

These are some of the concerns that the church should be aware of before it begins to disciple the immigrants. Let's ask ourselves, what can we Christians do for these needy strangers so that they can feel at home in America? Christina Nunez suggests: "What you can do? It's simple! So many refugees and immigrants, particularly undocumented, feel like outsiders, or worse- they feel invisible. So, if you come across someone who can tell is new to the country, start a conversation! I'm guessing he or she will have some amazing stories to share."³⁰ Next we will look at how the church can

²⁹Susan Schmidt (Revised 2011), *Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers* (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Service), 2-3

³⁰ Christina Nunez, accessed December 12, 2014,

proactively help these refugees assimilate in the community through proper discipleship and training.

Some Assimilating Strategies

In the previous pages we have shown several major challenges the Liberians face in America. This being our focus it is befitting to find ways to heal these problems. What are the best methods the church can reach out to this needy Liberian refugee? Earlier it was mentioned that different organizations have begun spearheading the discipleship tasks. Now it is the duty of the church to step in. The proposed step is to tackle those major issues one after another and then suggest possible creative measures for change.

Church Affiliation and Connection

The primarily assimilation strategy is arranging church affiliation for the Christian refugees. But there is a need for caution for the Liberians to minimize assimilation so that it does end up in total acculturation. It is advisable that refugees make a connection with the established Liberian churches in America. While attending a Liberian church, they are naturally interaction with the church members, singing Liberian songs, and speaking the Liberian language. These activities foster relationship and development. This would also save Liberians from totally abandoning their culture in the process of acculturation.

Solomon M. Muin narrated a story shared by a gospel Liberian artist: “My affiliation with the church helped me connect quickly and adjust to this society. Because I am a musician, every church called upon me to perform at their major gathering. At those gatherings, I wore our Liberian attire, sing our traditional gospel songs and eat our

traditional food. The church is playing a significant role in keeping Liberians connected to the homeland.³¹

There are Liberian Community organizations that work to safeguard the integration of Liberians so that the dominant culture of America does not completely assimilate the attachment with these groups.³² These organizations can be a great help for the newly arrived refugees and the other ethnic or tribal groups.³³ Some Liberian also do have their county or ethnic associations as well in America. As church affiliation can be a good starting point, the local church can take the initiative to assimilate them. There are some Liberian churches near Philadelphia and Pennsylvania is a host to many mosques and churches.³⁴ Even though refugee is not living in Pennsylvania, as much as possible, the broader church should be seeking out an opening and affirming congregation for the refugees somewhere in America. This is a very important step to discipleship.

³¹Solomon M. Muin, Personal Communication, June 2016, 39.

³² Some of the groups are: the *African Cultural Alliance of North America*, the *Liberian Association of Pennsylvania*, the *Multicultural Community Family Services*, the *Liberian Ministers Association of the Delaware Valley*, *Education Care Africa*, *Women of Substance*, the *ABC Men's Club*, and the *Pennsylvania Old-timers Athletic and Sports Association* among others.

³³ Among them these are significant ones, *Grand Gedeh Association*, the *Sinoe County Association*, the *United Nimba Citizens Organization*, the *Grand Bassa Association*, and the *United Manding Association of Philadelphia*

³⁴ Some of these churches are Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church, Victory Harvest International Fellowship, and Church of the Living God, Mission Bethel, United Missionary Baptist Church, Agape International Baptist Church, Refuge Baptist Church, Overbrook Assembly of God. Others are Christ International Lutheran Church, United People Church of God, Breath of God Ministries, and International Free Pentecostal Church among others.

Creative Church Projects

One great step can be starting a special project at a local church or churches, to provide necessary education for theoretical and practical disciples training exclusively for the Liberian refugees. For example, Serena's Coming Home project for the Liberians in New York can be a good model. She describes her project in *Coming Home: Connecting Older Liberians in the Diaspora with the Family and Friends at Home*. This creative model of art that uses photography and film that exists for the New Yorker can be an example to come up with something unique for Liberians throughout America. The entire abstract is quoted to give a better understanding of this project. "Coming Home is an arts initiative that uses photography and film to connect older Liberians in the Diaspora with friends and family at home. A group of elders in Staten Island came together to create messages for the author to carry to friends and family in Liberia. The author delivered the messages, filmed responses, and returned them to the Staten Island community. The project will culminate in a multimedia exhibit featuring the stories, photos, and films. The author used components of Photo Voice, a participatory action research strategy, and Social Network Theory as well as resilience framework to guide the arts initiative. In this article, the author describes the process of developing and implementing this project with Liberian elders in the New York Diaspora and discusses the ways in which its methodological approaches amplify the voices of community elders, address their culture and values, and raise public awareness about their special needs."³⁵

³⁵ Chaudhry, *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 25, no.1 (2008), 60

Special Church Ministry for Immigrants

Church does not exist just to preach the gospel of salvation to those who come to Sunday morning worship services. It is an agent of compassion and love for the physical, and emotional needs as well. The Liberians are apparently different from the Caucasian American in color, language, culture, beliefs and practices. After all, they have created barriers between themselves and the host country. What they need now in this situation is relationship and belonging. They are wondering whether they can ever feel at home in a strange continent like America. Therefore, when the church volunteers to reach out and help this community, they will experience the connection. Connecting with the refugees is the basic step to discipleship and assimilation. Without this step of building relationship there is no way to bring them to the church. With these types of projects, we can show them that we care.

English Language

Without communication skills, the Liberians cannot start anything in America. Shopping, working, friendship etc., all requires knowledge of English. According to Amy Morse in in *"A Look at Immigrant Youth: Prospects and Promising Practices*, "a teenager who is slow to learn the English language may feel lonely and isolated as there will be less interaction with peers.

Involvement in the church programs and activities are the best means of improving English language but the question is, how can we bring them to the church first? We can do this by inviting them for special programs for needy refugees or the church can proactively reach out to them for imparting English class. But since an

English test is a requirement for a good job, the church members can inform them of the English test exams and agencies such as *English Language Learners* (ELLs). We can also get online free professional development resources for learning English language from the website dedicated for the same purpose.³⁶

According to Susan Schmidt, “Lead and Trauma are two major concerns for the refugees. ‘Physicians warn the effect of lead: ‘Lead poisoning occurs when lead builds up in the body, often over months or years. Even small amounts of lead can cause serious health problems. ‘Children younger than 6 years are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning, which can severely affect mental and physical development. At very high levels, lead poisoning can be fatal.³⁷ High blood lead level is one of the biggest problems of the Liberian refugee children. It is also believed that recently arrived refugees have higher blood lead levels than others. In addition to that, the malnourishment among the Liberian children causes susceptibility to ingesting environmental lead and absorbing it into their bodies.³⁸

The church must educate the newly arriving refugees about the necessity and availability of preventive Healthcare. Give awareness on preventive health care services before they are infected in order to avoid future problems. Latest guidelines and recommendations³⁹ given by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for

³⁶Teaching Refugees, Looking for information about teaching refugees or teaching immigrant students?, accessed May 30, 2017. <https://therefugeecenter.org/resources/teaching-refugees/>

³⁷ Mayo Clinic Staff, Lead Poisoning (n.d) accessed May 30, 2017.

³⁸ Schmidt, 3.

³⁹BLL testing of all refugee children 6 months to 16 years old is required at entry to the US. This should be repeat of all refugee children 6 months to 6 years 3 to 6 months after refugee children are placed in permanent residences and older children, if warranted, regardless of initial test results.

Blood Lead Level (BLL) should be provided to the parents of refugee children. If possible, they can provide informative resources or direct them to the right departments⁴⁰ that are responsible to care the health and care of the immigrants.

Trauma is a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially due to prolonged harmful effect. Jon Allen, a psychologist at the Menninger Clinic in Houston, Texas who wrote *Coping with Trauma: A Guide to Self-Understanding* says that there are two components to a traumatic experience: the objective and the subjective. It is the subjective experience of the objective events that constitutes the trauma. The more you believe you are endangered, the more traumatized you will be. Psychologically, the bottom line of trauma is overwhelming emotion and a feeling of utter helplessness. There may or may not be bodily injury, but psychological trauma is coupled with physiological upheaval that plays a leading role in the long-range effects.⁴¹

Refugees usually experience a sense of constant mental anxiety and remorse due to the separation from relatives and friends. Some of them might be left behind and in some cases; the whereabouts of their dear ones are untraceable. Certainly, children become victim of this trauma when they have the experienced the brutality of warfare. Such experiences are incorporated into their play, artwork, speech and interactions with other children.

⁴⁰ Some resourceful centers with links are: 1. For general health issues, *Background on Potential Health Issues for Liberian Refugees*, Office of Global Health Affairs, Humanitarian and Refugee Health Affairs, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0847> 2. *Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) State Letter #05-07*, May 25, 2005, “CDC Recommendations for Lead Poisoning Prevention in Refugee Children” 3. *Lead, CDC Assorted Materials on Lead*, accessed May 30, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>

⁴¹ Jon G. Allen, *Coping with Trauma: A Guide to Self-Understanding*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1995. 14

Christian counseling can play a big role for traumatic sickness. Schmidt suggested that treatment done by their own Liberian Community might be more relevant at this stage: The Liberian war has been particularly brutal on all sectors of society. Mental health services provided with cultural sensitivity and which involve community members in developing such services, particularly elders or religious leaders, will be very important. Since mental health services may be unfamiliar to most Liberian refugees, services developed around practical or enjoyable activities may be better received.⁴²

It is always wise for the church to know the available resources to treat trauma.⁴³ These resources must be available for the refugees so that they can do something by themselves or by the help of their educated leaders. One such resource is *The Association of Liberian Ministers in the USA*. This resource is reaching out to Liberian religious leaders and institutions in the U.S. Another very crucial step is helping the refugees find their relatives back at home or somewhere in America. Perhaps the church can volunteer to help reunify the family members in the way Serena Chaudhry does by using photography and film. Ms. Chaudhry connects older Liberians in the Diaspora with friends and family at home. This would give a sense of hope and purpose for the people who have lost hope and purpose. Chaudhry continues, “the church can also assist the refugees to get help through local chapters of American Red Cross.⁴⁴ And there are many

⁴²Susan Schmidt (Revised 2011), 4

⁴³ These are helpful resources suggested by BRYCS. ORR, together with OGHA and SAMHSA’s Refugee Mental Health Program (technical assistance provider on mental health for ORR); Also visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Web site. The NCTSN’s Refugee Trauma Task Force. The Association of Liberian Ministers in the USA (ALiMUSA); The Website for the Center for Victims of Torture.

⁴⁴ International Services, Helping to Save Lives Around the World, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/international-services>.

local refugee resettlement offices⁴⁵ that help with the procedure of reunification. As civil war has brought social life upside down in Liberia, the church can develop activities that will rebuild trust and friendship among the Liberians in America.

Parenting and Child Raising Training

First, the head of the household must be educated with US laws and expectations concerning parenting and childcare. This can be done in many ways – personally and collectively, formally, and informally, directly or indirectly. Collectively the church can organize a seminar for parents or would-be-parents and impart the basic parenting education.

Secondly, the established Liberian families in America can be encouraged by the church to mentor the newly arrived parents for modeling parenting practices in the U.S. This would make the discipleship more receptive and effective especially for those who cannot speak English.

Thirdly, the local church can organize family activities that help strengthen relationships between parents and children. It can be a special family dinner, family outings or mother-daughter/father-son activities.

Fourthly, refugee teens ought to be mentored by church leaders or selected youth from the church on American culture and morals so that they are able to distinguish between positive and negative practices of culture. Youth should be well informed that a culture should not be adopted without proper justification. There is a need to retain

⁴⁵ Administration of Children and families, accessed May 25, 2017, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/index.htm

certain Liberian culture and ethnic practices that are good. Also, there are good American culture practices that are morally commendable. This would help them integrate aspects of both their original culture and their new culture. Both BRYCS Guardianship Facts,⁴⁶ and The BRYCS Parenting Manual, *Strengthening Services for Refugee Parents: Guidelines and Resource*, are very useful.⁴⁷ We can all use the necessary guidelines and information on US parenting.

Fifth, child discipline is another issue in this study. No matter how the differently Liberians discipline a child they need to know child welfare standards.⁴⁸ In the U.S, the role of CPS, and what happens if children call 911 to report their parents for abuse. Parents must be taught the consequences of a discipline that leaves a mark and the extreme use of painful punishments such as hot peppers and the like. Instead, alternative means of non-physical discipline should be encouraged. For instance, provide acceptable tools of discipline like “time outs” and “grounding. Parents should know the distinction between discipline that guides a child towards behavioral change and punishment which is an imposition for a child’s wrong doing.

Sixth, high levels of violence and killing, separation because of flight and sending children away for safety during the war. Liberian civil war has created a larger number of separations from their biological parents or extended families. Many are unable to

⁴⁶Guardianship Fact Sheet for Staff Assisting Refugee Families, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0527>

⁴⁷ Clearinghouse Resource, accessed May 30,2017,www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0616.

⁴⁸For a general overview of the child welfare system, see *How Does the Child Welfare System Work*, by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.cfm And for a more detail look at the child welfare system, read *A Family’s Guide to the Child Welfare System*, by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA).

trace their relatives. In some cases, prolonged separation cause lack of bonding between parent and child. The most needful care a parent could have given to their children were missed in the children's life. Children may feel angry at them and thinking their parents have intentionally abandoned them, which can lead to misunderstanding between parents and children. It is advisable that separated children should be given careful preparation before arrival and additional supervision⁴⁹ after resettlement. Those children who are reunified with parents after long periods of severance need more care and monitoring. The church can arrange child care centers but any individual can decide to help these children. Adoption by childless parents is a good option. The church can also introduce them to a good Christian child care center or orphanage; especially for the refugees. These are some of the possible ways for the church to assimilate them in American culture and community. Refugee children who do have parents or relatives may be eligible for specialized refugee foster care programs funded by ORR.⁵⁰

Seventh, for Liberians sex before marriage is a taboo. As they came to the United States, they found the idea of sex is more liberal. Girls who have gone through sexual abuse, such as rape during the war need special care. Some refugees have taken up sex as commerce for survival. As a result, some Liberians report that some girls developed

⁴⁹ BRYCS document *Suitability Assessment Tips: Safeguarding Refugee Children Who Arrive Without Parents*, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0545>. BRYCS document *Separated Refugee Children in the United States: Challenges and Opportunities* www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=0856.

⁵⁰ Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services, *The Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program of the U.S. Refugee Program*, accessed May 30, 2017, www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/clearinghouse-resource.cfm?docnum=4013.

serious and physical sickness such as “sugar daddies.” Those who have gone through this extreme exploitation may be more vulnerable to further exploitation.

As a ministry of compassion, the Church is the right place where mature and spiritual people can educate youth on sexuality. Healthy dating in American culture and acceptable ways of romance can be taught. Refugee teenagers, both male and female as well as adults, must be educated about U.S. laws regarding statutory rape (sex between an adult and a minor) and date rape (when a partner does not take “no” for an answer). These laws include the possibilities of jail time and deportation for convictions,⁵¹ in addition to imparting US laws governing sexual act.⁵²

Legal and Refugee Policies

Migration policies differ depending on the time in which they arrived. Liberians who arrived before 1990 largely came on temporary visas as students or tourists. Once their visas expire, they try to legalize their stay. The U.S. government used to grant temporary protected status (TPS),⁵³ in 1991 to those who applied for it. However, the majority were not informed and so they missed the privileges due to ignorance. Others missed this opportunity due to the inability to afford the application fees.

⁵¹ Schmidt, 12.

⁵² Sexual laws and Policy Center, accessed on May 30, 2017, <https://www.sexlawandpolicy.org/about/>

⁵³ After TPS was terminated in 2007 and deferred enforced departure (DED) was applied, but it also ended in September 2014. Under TPS/DED travel to Liberia is not permitted. If they wish to travel outside the United States, they have to apply for a travel document (Form I-131) in case they fail to fulfil the requirement they may not be allowed to re-enter the United States. Deferred enforced departure (DED), which was applied only to Liberian, is granted by the president of the United States as part of his power to conduct foreign relations.

Integration

Most mainline denominations in the United States are losing members and First United Methodist Church of Bristol, Pennsylvania comes in the same category. The researcher identified the major issues to address in the church as it related to the lack of assimilation programs through welcoming especially among the immigrant minority Liberian Community in Bristol, Pennsylvania. The context of this project is at First United Methodist Church, Bristol, Pennsylvania which is not a truly welcoming community through assimilation. They also lack the courage, encouragement and welcoming skills. The project is designed to encourage, train and help the church members to become more effective in their outreach ministry to the local community through this model of assimilation. The researcher believes that the development of this model will enhance the congregation to increase the awareness of the purpose of bringing in people through assimilation and the given responsibilities as stewards of God's mission and faith. This new awareness, skills and education will be a catalyst to empower them and as a result to develop more welcoming skill and become a welcoming vibrant community.

We know that people come to the food pantry just to receive food on a weekly basis but do not worship on Sunday. Parent whose kids attend the After-School program, drop off and pick up their kids only and are not part of the congregation. These wider church relational groups and the various prayer groups that meet at the church do not worship or are not part of the congregation. Visitors comes and do not return. Do people from the neighborhood really feel accepted when they visit is a leadership question. If most of the people of the different ministries are encouraged to worship or join the

congregation the mother congregation will grow. As part of this document we have composed a historical reflection of the city of Bristol and other mainline and Protestant denominations earlier founded in Bristol. Our topic, assimilation into the church for church growth in an ethnic diversity community, is a challenging scenario.

In my autobiography I shared that my parents were poor and that neither my father nor mother were educated. I was self-supporting from elementary school through high school. The opportunity of me travelling to the United States was a blessing from the Almighty God to serve God's people. From my context in Liberia, I see that there is a need for the Liberian Community in Bristol to be connected to The United Methodist Church to worship based on their own tradition and worship style. As pastor of the African ministry and head of the outreach and evangelism, I want to assimilate the Liberian Community to First United Methodist Church of Bristol, because many of them were United Methodists in Liberia.

It is also important to study through the Biblical Foundations that Israel's self-assertion was remarkable followed by God's crucial action for liberation in the Exodus story. As a result of Israel crying in bondage and God knowing that He must act in remembering His covenant with the Patriarch He immediately acted. This action again reminds us that God's purpose is to remember His promises for His people. God is therefore not only the God of the past, but God of the present and the future. God is in the present time listening to the crying voice of the needy in their hurt and pain which includes the immigrant minority Liberian Community represented at The First United Methodist Church. On both sides of Israel and God, there must be a crying voice in prayer, and there must be a divine intervention to immediately send a deliverer. It is

unique in Israel's situation that Moses, the first missionary in Exodus, was met by God at the right time and at the right place to be commissioned for the delivering of Israel.

Although Moses gave numerous excuses, God still used him and Aaron to deliver the Israelites because God's mission was possible to set Israel free from bondage. In the New Testament, Jesus' mission was also crucial to deliver God's people from oppression to continue the mission of delivering from the creation of the world from Genesis to Revelation. On the other hand, in the New Testament, it is interesting to remember that God is fulfilling past prophecy to remember His covenant with the descendants of Abraham, fulfilling prophecy that was made in the Old Testament in Isaiah 9:6. A prophecy that says, "For a child has been born for us, a son is given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and His name is wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace." Following this long time of prophecy, God sent His only begotten Son, "Emmanuel," God is with us." Jesus purpose of coming was not only to save Israel, but to save the whole world. Matthew 28:16-20 clearly brings out its most important theme which says, "That the Father has given Jesus supreme and universal authority." As in assimilation or disciple-makers, we are therefore charged to share the good news not only to one nation, but to all nations.

The word of hope and assurance in the New Testament is that the risen Christ promised He will guide, strengthen, and protect the Church until God's kingdom comes in its fullness. According to the Gospel of Matthew, it seems that the ministry of Jesus Christ begins in Galilee, so is likely that this is the reason that Jesus must commission the disciples in Galilee. In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptizer was baptizing in the wilderness for the forgiveness of sins. Following His baptism Jesus began His preaching ministry

after spending forty days and night fasting in the wilderness, according to Matthew 4:1. Jesus' public ministry initially begin in Matthew 5:1. His preaching ministry continues through the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew, where He was denied, condemned and crucified by the high priests and the religious leaders. It is clear, that Jesus' coming into the world was to fulfill God's mission, and God's plan of salvation in the life of humanity. According to Matthew 28:1-15, the news of the risen Christ shook Jerusalem and the surrounding area to the surprise of the religious leaders

The appearances of the risen Christ to the women according to Matthew 28:9-11 and Luke 24:36, are all convincing proof that Jesus was raised from the dead. Finally, Jesus' appearance on the mountain in Galilee where He had directed His disciples to give them instructions, and assurance to be with not only the disciples at the time, but with the Church until the end of time. This is our hope as the Church of Jesus Christ as well as the resurrection story. We are therefore encouraged to continue the mission of the Church to make disciples in every community, and to reach everyone no matter what language, cultural background and every nation following Jesus' instructions with His power through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Following Jesus final commissioning, we are assured that the Holy Spirit is present with the Church, and we are not alone, because God is with us through our journey.

This model by the early disciples to keep the new converts after baptism is to be followed by the church today, because the church must be a community that invites, encourages and keeps new members. After Wesley connected people together as a class, he and his colleagues later started as missionaries from place to place to preach and to empower others to go and make disciples. It is mentioned in this project that Wesley was

not just a preacher, he was a theologian, teacher, and a missionary as well. He also served as a bishop when he ordained Francis Asbury and others and sent them on disciple-making trips. Wesley also ordained other people, he and his colleagues empowered others by laying hands on lay-preachers and sent them to go and preach to make disciples. It was from this point that the movement continued to grow. Wesley's strategy of making disciples was clear when he preached more than one hundred and fifty sermons from community to community to change lives. Continuing to make disciples, Wesley and some of his colleagues traveled from England through Europe to the United States.

Wesley's primary concern in taking the gospel to all was to strike a chord in the hearts of people and to challenge them to make themselves right with God. He helped plant the seed of the Gospel in people's hearts as well as to fertilize the hearts of those that already had the seeds planted in their hearts with his preaching. One of his primary focuses was to attend and pray for the outcasts and those without help. Today, there are millions of believers of United Methodism and other denominations that Wesley influenced in and around the world. Wesleyan denominations besides The United Methodist Church are the Wesleyan Church, The Free Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and seventy-five other denominations. Members of the World Methodist Council gather regularly around the world.

Also following Wesley's influences, there are more Methodist seminaries, hospitals, holiness camp meetings, and Theological Societies. There are more than eighty million followers of John Wesley today in and around the world, and all these

followers are encouraged because of Wesley's influences. Studies indicate that John Wesley died but his words still live today. Some of his words as we remember today are, "The world is my Parish, my heart was strangely warmed, earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can, offer them to Christ."⁵⁴ All these words and more were Wesley's influences of making disciples, and are still used today in the church. Again, the goal of this project is to make disciples by assimilating and connecting the Liberian Community of Bristol, Pennsylvania into First United Methodist Church. John Wesley was very influential and was encouraged by his mother, Mrs. Susannah Wesley from early childhood. It is interesting to learn in the history of First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania that the use of "class meeting" was exactly the method used in Bristol. It is said that back in 1788, Mary Connor was one of the people converted by Captain Thomas Webb (a British itinerant minister commissioned to preach Methodism). We are told that he preached to a group of people on Wood Street in Bristol, Pennsylvania. It is interesting in our history of Bristol First Church that Mary Connor is considered the Mother of Methodism in Bristol and was converted to the faith when Thomas Webb preached. All this itinerant preaching is John Wesley's strategy for Disciple-Making that grew Methodism from England to the United States and into a total of 138 countries.

Discipleship may involve training and helping people to be followers all the way, as well as calling others to come and follow Christ. This project will encourage and bring the Liberian Community of Bristol Pennsylvania together to worship God in their

⁵⁴ Dan Graves, "John Wesley's heart strangely warmed," Christianity, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/john-wesleys-heart-strangely-warmed-11630227.html>.

own worship styles and in other educational groups as well. There is a plan to have a Bible study groups as well as small groups for discussion toward growth, and how to reach more people in the Liberian Community. As we have studies and strategies in making disciples, it is the goal of this project to call the community to witness and imitate as the early Christians did to continue to grow the church. In fulfilling the mission of the church, we are called to proclaim Christ's Lordship in a meaningful way as instructed by Christ, known as the, "Great Commission." Reaching the unreached, inviting and encouraging everyone, and ministering the Gospel to them is the goal of this project.

This project is creating an evangelism strategy not only to evangelize but making disciples for the un-churched. We will disciple both new and old converts and help educate them to grow and become disciples as well and this is discipleship to discipleship. We must follow Christ's examples because He came to invite all, though not everyone accepted His teaching. We must follow those good strategies from theologians in the past and from whose study and contributions the Christian Church has greatly benefited. They continue to provide us with great disciple-making models.

Migration of the Africans, particularly the Liberians, in the United States is a major historical concern that needs special study and attention to inform the uninformed and to extend possible help toward the migrants. Liberian Americans are of two categories: those who are fully of Liberians ancestry and those of partial Liberian ancestry. They can be African-American descent or Liberian people in America. The first Liberians' expatriation to America, after the slavery period, took place after the First Liberian Civil War in the 1980s. The second came after the Liberian Civil War in the

early 2000s. It is estimated that roughly about 100,000 Liberians live in the U.S. as of this time.⁵⁵

To help better comprehend the intensity of the challenges the Liberian refugees face, this article briefly outlined the historical backdrop of the Liberians struggle, their cultural distinctiveness in comparison to the host country, the United States. It then answers why Liberians are given refugee status in US and what is the historical tie that binds these two nations from different continents?

Then we would underscore the significant impacts on the Liberians in United States due to factors such as acculturation, social and economic divergence. The write-up would encompass the prevailing challenges the Liberian Americans are facing from the theoretical standpoint. It will evaluate the major social and cultural barriers between the Diasporas and the native community and then delineate necessary strategies for assimilating them to become disciples. This includes measures that can be taken up by the homeland churches including The First United Methodist Church in Bristol Pennsylvania. The goal is to help the refugees find a Liberian Church, start creative projects for the refugees; organize various programs for them, etc. These proposals or suggestions are meant to enhance the discipleship with in the church because they are inseparable elements of assimilation as well as making disciples.

Great numbers of scholarly and helpful works are available on the Liberians of America, both in the Internet and in printed form. Moreover, American government has been working tirelessly to solve the challenges migrants are facing on American soil.

⁵⁵ Liberian Americans, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, accessed May 25, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberian_Americans,

There are government policies and special provisions for the migrants in America. There is also government funded and non-governmental organizations⁵⁶ formed to foster development, provide education, and bridge national and international barriers the Liberians are facing. But here the attempt of the research is to enhance the responsibility of the local church towards the mission among the Liberian community in the Bristol Pennsylvania area. This theoretical framework will enable the researcher to look in to this issue from a psychological, sociological and philosophical framework. This will also be able to awaken the slumbering churches to rise on their feet and reach out to the needy Liberian immigrants in the United States.

The lofty goal of making discipleship of the Liberians by means of assimilating into the community of the church is the emphasis here. Beginning with the background highlighting the origin and people of Liberia, we see how Liberia as the only U.S. colony was established. As a result, America by its initiative involvement in the creation of Liberia, is obligated to extend help toward these Liberians who have been badly affected by the civil war and the long period of flight. Therefore, the church of America too is obligated to assist the immigrants from Liberia. To achieve that the writer, after the problems and issues are revealed, has proposed helpful proactive measures such as church affiliation, imparting language, parental and legal education.

⁵⁶ Some of these organizations are: African Culture Association of the United States (ACAUS), Liberian Philadelphia Associations (LPA) Liberian Resettlement of Refugees (LRR), Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy (LWMGCA), Philadelphia Anthropological Group (PAG), United Community Group for Nimba County Residents (UCGNCR), United Men's Association (UMA), Organization of Liberians in Minnesota Liberian-American-Swedish Minerals Company, LICANY Liberian Community Association of New York County LIMANY Liberian Mandingo Association of New York LISANY Liberian Students Association of New York LCM Liberian Community of Minnesota, Liberian Renaissance Foundation.

If the church could faithfully implement these suggestions, there is a high prospect of development and growth in making disciples. In this assimilation process, Liberians of every age must be involved, because The United Methodist Church is the starting point of such a program. I am encouraging the group of Liberians already on hand in the church in Bristol to come together as an outreach team to reach others. In continuation of this project, our outreach team will bring other Liberians together to have prayer services, worship services, Bible studies and more for the improvement of this project. We must always encourage the Caucasians to accept all Liberians with a truly welcoming heart, as we continue to invite them into First United Methodist Church of Bristol.

We must continue to encourage all Americans that Liberians coming from sixteen years of civil war need to be resettled. Although the refugee and the resettlement programs are over, Liberians in America continue to apply and invite their families into the United States to improve their living conditions.

Liberians now living in America are aware that it is truly a blessing by God to have the opportunity to enter in to the land of opportunity. So, our priority is to worship God for this is the primary focus of the project. Our discipleship program will send outreach teams with flyers to all grocery stores in the community to create awareness of all programs scheduled to be held at the church. Our discipleship project also includes helping the newcomer to find a job, and to help them get their driving permits to get them on their feet. Knowing our history, and suffering during the civil war, many Liberians are very serious about finding a job and being able to drive when they enter the United States. One way of making disciples in the community will be by helping to provide

transportation to and from work. Transportation can also be given to their children to attend school, or day-care. Orientations of the new Liberians must take place in the church especially at First United Methodist Church of Bristol. Our discipleship team includes older women to speak with the younger girls and older men to counsel the young boys upon arrival about life in the United States. Some of this counseling had already been taking place during our gathering of celebrating our Independence Day held in First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania.

The mission of the Church is to make disciples, or to assimilate people for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by proclaiming the good news of God's grace. The visible church of Christ as a faithful community of persons affirms the worth of all humanity and the value of interrelationship in all of God's creation. Based on this great task entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ an attempt is made in this qualitative research to create a strategic model of assimilating the Liberians Community into the church in this context.

Conclusion

One of the goals of this assimilation project is to reinforce with the Liberian Community in FUMC of Bristol, that we are one people no matter what language and this is our motto: “we are one.” As Christians, we must carry fliers to every gathering of the Liberian Community; to graduation parties, cook-outs, weddings and birthday parties, etc.

This is an important way we can encourage those without a home-church, or without any church to visit First United Methodist Church of Bristol.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The theme for this doctoral project is “Assimilating the Liberian Community at First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania. First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania is a Caucasian Church with fifteen minority members of the Liberian Community. Due to the lack of assimilation and welcoming skills, the church is declining in membership, especially with the Liberian Community. The hypotheses for this project are; if First United Methodist Church of Bristol put into practice the theme “Open Heart, Open Minds, and Open Doors,” through welcoming, the assimilation process of the Liberian Community will be complete and active.

The problem is that FUMC has demonstrated an unwillingness to welcome and accept the presence of the local Liberian Community. Before deciding to do this project, we must reflect on some information. It is now over ten years since I went to First Church. At the completion of my MDiv in 2008, I was sent to FUMC to take over the African/ Liberian ministry. Before this time, I had an experience while living in Columbus, Ohio with my family in 2006. I always wanted to stay connected to The United Methodist Church. Looking for the nearest United Methodist Church to worship, we found one on Cleveland Avenue about one mile from where we lived. On Sunday morning, I took my entire family, about nine persons, to this United Methodist Church to

worship. Upon entering the church, we all sat on one pew and we were excited to worship with a newly located United Methodist Church for the first time.

The pews were occupied later with about forty to fifty congregants. We were greatly surprised that no one ever came to greet us and welcome our family to the church.

The pastor did not even welcome our family in to worship until the entire service was over. From that point, my family told me that we would never return to that United Methodist Church to worship. Some few years later, we saw that same church had closed because of the lack of membership. I, however, remembered my own situation and believe that the lack of welcoming and accepting was the cause of the declining of the church. It is slowly going to be the same with First United Methodist Church of Bristol if assimilation and welcoming skills are not put into practice. It is clear from the early church model that God wants His Church to grow without limit provided there are assimilation and welcoming skills practiced by all members not only the pastor.

Delos Miles says “Now, look once more at the Ephesians passages. Note the phrases ‘body growth’, ‘mature manhood,’ and ‘grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.’ This is the passage on the church. To Paul, church growth is body growth because the church is the body of Christ. Also, to Paul, Jesus Christ is the perfect model for measuring ‘mature manhood.’ The Church growth which we seek should be balance. It should exhibit balance between quantity and quality, between ingrowth and outgrowth, between pragmatics and ethics.”¹ As the researcher of this project, I believe and will highly recommend that every pastor and member of the local United Methodist Church be responsible to welcome and accept everyone into their church.

¹ Delos Miles, *Church Growth, A Mighty River*, (Nashville, TN. Broadman Press, 1981), 148.

Knowing the importance of the Mission of the church, the lack of mission and assimilation skills, the Liberian Community has declined over the past years. The mission statement of First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania states, “To be a Spiritual home, where people can find God’s grace and healing. The attempt is to offer the hope and unconditional love of Christ to all people, and to support people in growing as disciples, practicing love and forgiveness and using their gifts in services to Christ in our local Community and the world,” (church bulletin back page). This is a good mission statement for First Church, if the statement is being fulfilled, but welcoming the Liberian Community and accepting them into the church is not being fulfilled as stated.

We see that the early disciples followed the mission of the Church as they continued to grow the Church. They truly followed the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. A. Donald McGavran and Arn C. Win state, “The early Church grew explosively. The number of the disciples multiplied greatly. A great many of the Priests were obedient to the faith. Multitudes became new creatures in Christ and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But what sparked this mighty surge of church growth? The growth of the church is seldom the result of just one factor; however, the fantastic growth of the early Church was powerfully influenced by one unshakable conviction: that belief in Jesus Christ was essential for salvation. In Christ alone do people have new life as a gift from God.”²

First United Methodist Church of Bristol is full of other ministries during the week but is declining in attendance with both the Caucasians and the Liberian

²² Donald A. McGavran and Win C. Arn: *How to Grow a Church*, (Ventura, CA, A division of GL Publications 1983), 22-23.

Community. New members or visitors do not stay but go through the back door. The church has difficulty getting new members to assimilate and participate in the meaningful ministries to the Church and community.

The hypothesis for this project was if members of the Liberian Community be truly welcomed and accepted in the life and ministries of the church based on assimilation, greater numbers would participate in the ministries of the church. The purpose of this project is developed to encourage members of First United Methodist Church of Bristol to assimilate members of the Liberian Community into the life and ministries of the church to further create a growing blended worship service. This can only be done by a successful assimilation process, welcoming and accepting the presence of the Liberian Community into the life and ministry of First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania.

Methodology

Data Collection

To establish and confirm the validity of my research, the data for this project was triangulated. Data was collected into 1) surveys of a small group of both Liberian and Caucasians members; 2) interviews with the Leadership team of the membership ministry; and 3) Recommendations and feedback from members from the Liberian and Caucasian Communities.

July 2008, membership statistical data revealed around eighty Caucasians and thirty members of the Liberian Community. However, of the 110 total members in attendants in ten years, there has been no growth, only decline. The thirty members of

the Liberian Community declined to ten over the past decade. The beginning of the implementation process of this project brought them to fifteen members now. Members of the Caucasians had also declined to around twenty to twenty-one members in attendance even on the first Sunday or Communion day of the month. Within a decade, there had been four pastors coming to take over First United Methodist Church every two to four years. What can we say is the cause of the declining of First Church? Is it because of the changing of pastors that led to the decline of membership? Another thing is that among the Caucasians, there are no young persons among the congregants. The ages of people among the Caucasians ranges from fifty years up. Among the Liberian Community, their ages range from twenty years up. Over the past years, new members or visitors coming to the church come into the front door but go through the back door and never return.

The review of the assimilation process revealed that members of the Liberian Community are not being welcomed into the church and this is the reason for the declining. As the researcher of this project, I am the assisting pastor, head of the outreach ministry and pastor of the Liberian Ministry but I am not paid for my service. Serving these positions, I am constantly inviting Liberians into the church, but they attend once or twice and never return because they are not being welcomed into the church.

On one Sunday morning, I invited a praise and worship leader for the Liberian Community. At the beginning of the service I introduced her to our senior pastor and said she would like to take part in the service by singing for us a praise song. This time she was given the chance and she sang a beautiful African praise song. It seemed that she

was not appreciated and was not satisfied at the end of the service. I walked to her, congratulated and thanked her after the service, and she did not say anything to me at the time. I tried my best to contact the sister during the week, but she did not return to the church. I called her on the phone to see when she would return to visit our church. She told me that she was not really welcomed into the church by many of the Caucasians during the meet and greet so she did not want to return to visit.

The implementation of this project is designed to create a strategy to encourage the assimilation process at FUMC. After the review of the assimilation and the welcoming process of the Liberian Community, some problem areas were identified. There were some problems with some of the older members of the Caucasians Community with communication. Some of the Caucasians, especially the older ones, have difficulty understanding the speech of the Liberians. There was also a problem with some of the older Caucasians contacting members of the Liberian Community members on the phone to check on them when they were not in service. There were complaints from some of the Liberian Community members that no one called them to make a follow up if they were not in service. Statistical data on welcoming members of the Liberian Community was not readily available or being tracked consistently.

Recommendation to improve the welcoming process of the Liberian Community included, restructuring the greeter team at the door at the beginning of the service. This is to improve the effective communication, and clarification of the role of someone who is clearly understood by members of the older Caucasian Community. Additional volunteers will be appointed to be responsible to assist those that are difficult to be understood, to interpreted or translate for them during the time of passing of the peace or

meet and greet. The volunteers will also be responsible to assist new members of the Liberian Community to fill in the attendance form and offer orientation, if there is a need.

The orientation process would be offered more frequently to members of the Liberian Community on the first and last Sunday of each month to create flexibility in the welcoming process. We recommend that this would be two to three hours of the tradition that teaches the history of First United Methodist Church of Bristol and an introduction of United Methodist history, beliefs and practices. Beginning October 2018, the volunteers' coordinator position was filled. The volunteer coordinators will work during church services at the door along with greeters and at the time of meet and greet or the passing of the peace. The coordinator will make sure that the secretary maintains accurate records and updates records. Any misunderstanding of any party, either the Caucasians or the Liberian Community, would be corrected and effective communication must flow on both sides.

Data Analysis

In November 2018, the project continues to be implemented and recommended changes to the current assimilation and welcoming process being initiated. At the beginning of the implementation of the project from September 2018, through December 2018, the Liberian Community members are now increasing from ten to about fifteen members in worship at FUMC. The five additional members included two families of the present Liberian Community members and three new members that were invited to join the church. Volunteer's coordinators are now working with the greeter at the beginning of the worship services and during the time of meet and greet or passing of the peace.

These new members are currently undergoing new member's orientation with the volunteer coordinators to promote effective communication from the Liberian Community side to the Caucasians for better understanding of both sides.

Additionally, the new members that joined between Septembers through December 2018 are being surveyed. The purpose of the survey was to gather data from the new members on the personal experience of assimilation and welcoming process into the culture and ministries of First United Methodist Church of Bristol. We also used the survey to gather information from the members regarding our first and second worship services and other fellowship opportunity programs and events. The survey was taking from the congregants of the church. All the members of the second service were surveyed. Each congregant was instructed to answer each question anonymously and honestly. Certain questions allowed for free-written response feedback. Those questions and some of the answers are explained below:

Question one: Are you a visiting member or a registered member of FUMC? The answer choices were: Member or a visiting member. Answer selected was Member.

Question two: What is your position in the church? The answer choices were, gift in prayer leader, singing, or organizing. Answer selected was, prayer leader.

Question three: What song or music would you prefer for the second service? Of the thirty congregants surveyed, twenty-two answered the question while eight skipped the question. The answer choices were: Some African song or music, Contemporary music, Traditional music, American music, or any Gospel music. Fifteen persons answered, Contemporary music. Seven persons answered African Gospel music. So, the

two answers chosen were, Contemporary music and African gospel music for the second service.

Question four: How long have you been here, attending or visiting, First United Methodist Church of Bristol? Of the thirty congregants of the second service surveyed, twenty-six answered the question while four participants skipped the question. The answer choices were: zero to five years, six to ten years, eleven to fifteen years, and fifteen to twenty years, or twenty years and above. Out of the twenty-six members, seven answered, six to ten years, five answered, eleven to fifteen years, twelve members answered fifteen to twenty years. While two answered, twenty years and above.

Question five: How would you compare the fellowship opportunities, programs and events offered to you and your family at FUMC? (Consider quality and quantity.) Of the thirty members surveyed, twenty-five answered the question, while five skipped the question. The choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Not Good. Out of the twenty members, five answered Excellent, three persons answered Very Good, five answered Good, twelve answered Not Good. From those surveyed, it seems that most of the Liberian Community members answered, Not Good.

Question six: How well does First United Methodist Church communicate event information to you? Of the thirty members surveyed, twenty-six answered the question, while four skipped the question. The answer choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Not Good. Of the twenty-six members, six answered, Excellent, six answered, Very Good, ten answered, Good, and four answered, Not Good. Common constructive comment from free-written feedback were: Better communication via Sunday bulletins, non-media outlets, better communication of smaller events and more notice of events.

Question seven: How would you count your experience with assimilating into the culture, ministries and Community at FUMC? The answer choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Not Good. Out of the thirty congregants surveyed, eleven members answered the question, while nineteen skipped the question. Of the eleven that answered the question, eight answered, Good. Three persons answered, Not Good. Common constructive comments from the free-written feedback were: Poor Ministry follow-up with members, not better welcoming feeling or accepting. Better communication is needed to include everyone.

Question eight: How often do you use the Drum in Sunday worship service? (Consider relevance of all participants, length of time, etc.) The answer choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Not Good. Of the thirty participants surveyed, twenty-four answered the question, while six skipped the question. Sixteen members answered, Very Good. Four persons answered, Good, and four persons answered, Not Good. Common constructive comments from the free-written feedback were: Length of service, music volume sometimes loud, relevance of message, order of service, more reading of the liturgy.

Question nine: How would you consider your experience of service with the food pantry? Consider relevance of time and services. Of the thirty members surveyed, twenty members answered the question, while ten skipped the question. The answer choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Not Good. Two persons answered Excellent, fifteen of twenty answered, Very Good, three persons answered Not Good. Common constructive free-written feed-back were: Service length concerns, faster services needed and more choices of food in the pantry.

Question ten: How well do you relate to the older Caucasians during the meet and greet or the passing of the peace relating to welcoming and accepting people into the church? The answer choices were: Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Not Good. Of the twenty-eight congregants surveyed, twenty-six answered the question, while two skipped the question. Out of the twenty-six members, twenty-three answered, Very Good. three persons answered, Not Good. Common constructive comment from the free-written feedback were: Better greeting is needed, also not showing of true welcoming, sometimes no good communication during the passing of the peace or meet and greet.

Question eleven: To create our overall participation, what challenges have you experienced when considering programs (like revival)? Of the thirty members surveyed, nineteen answered the question, while eleven skipped the question. This question was a free response question to answer choices were not provided to those surveyed. Of the responses given. Common constructive comments and feedback were: Distant travel, time of events, working hours and age group representation.

Question twelve: Do you agree that American/Caucasian Churches are the best welcoming churches in the US? Of the thirty congregants surveyed, twenty answered the question, while ten skipped the question. The choices were: Strongly agree, agree, and disagree, and strongly disagree. Fifteen members answered agree, three answered, disagree, two answered strongly disagree.

Question thirteen: Do you agree that having a revival every month would help bring church growth to FUMC? Of the twenty-seven congregants surveyed, twenty-three answered the question, while four skipped the question. The choices were: strongly

agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. Sixteen answered, agree, four answered, strongly agree and three answered, disagree.

Question fourteen: Especially among members of the Liberian Community, do you like American or Caucasian Churches among all other churches? Of the thirteen congregants surveyed, eleven members answered the question, while two skipped the question. The choices were: Agree, strongly agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. Seven of the eleven members answered, agree, three answered, disagree, one answered strongly disagree.

Question fifteen: Do you think cultural differences are strong and affect our growth at FUMC? Of the thirty-one members surveyed, twenty-one answered the question, while ten skipped the question. Fifteen out of twenty-one members answered; Strongly agree. One member answered, strongly disagree, while five answered agree. Common constructive comment from the free-written feedback were: Same culture, different people. Same family, same people, same practices and one belief.

Question sixteen: Do you think you really need to invite, welcome others into FUMC? Of the twenty-seven members surveyed, twenty-two answered the question, while five skipped the question. The choices were: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Ten answered, strongly agree, six members answered, agree, and two answered, disagree and four strongly disagree. Common constructive comment from the free-written feedback were: Willing to come, does not need to be called.

Question seventeen: Inviting your neighbors, co-workers or friends from the Liberian/Caucasian Community to FUMC, is a good idea? Of the thirty-two members surveyed, twenty-five answered the question and seven persons skipped the question.

The answer choices were: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Nineteen of the members answered, agree. Four members answered, strongly agree, two members answered strongly disagree. Common constructive comment on the free-written feedback were: Willing to come to church but busy on Sunday morning with work and family.

Question eighteen: Do you think welcoming people to FUMC is an important Christian life-style? Of the thirty-two congregants surveyed, twenty-five members answered the question, while seven skipped the question. The choices were: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. Of the members who answered the question, seventeen answered, agree, five answered, disagree, and three answered strongly disagree. Common constructive comment from free-written feedback were: Willing to welcome people but people are not willing to come to church.

Question nineteen: Do you believed that the Liberian Community is being truly welcomed into First United Methodist Church of Bristol? Of the thirty members surveyed, eighteen answered the question, while twelve skipped the question. The choices were: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. Of the eighteen members who answered the question, sixteen members answered, agree, two answered, strongly disagree. Common constructive comment on free-written feedback were: Not willing to attend, if welcome and are not willing to come.

Question twenty: Do you believed FUMC is the best church of welcoming everyone into our community? Of the twenty-nine congregants surveyed, twenty-five members answered the question while four skipped the question. The choices were: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Sixteen congregants answered,

strongly agree, six members answered, agree, three answered, strongly disagree.

Common constructive comment on free-written feedback was: First church is among the best, maintaining our tradition but always remains first place.

During the surveyed questions, members of the Liberian Community remain committed to be part of the church and are willing to participate in the life and ministries of First United Methodist Church of Bristol Pennsylvania.

Implementation

As stated previously, after the thorough review of the Liberian Community, the assimilation process was completed and the recommendations to improve the process included. Additionally, we plan to strengthen the membership ministry to include appointing a volunteer and a ministry coordinator to review better welcoming skills from time to time with the Liberian Community. We will also practice and offer a better welcoming and orientation classes for new members of the Liberian Community. Looking at the organizational structure of the Liberian Community, the volunteer coordinator will also work with a recording secretary to keep a record of any one visiting from the Liberian Community. The volunteer secretary's primary role will be to update the contact information and addresses and to keep a complete record of anyone joining us from the Liberian Community.

In March 2012, the attendance of the Liberian Community was around thirty persons during our worship services. This membership later declined and is now around ten persons to fifteen. Although some family members moved out of Bristol to relocate due to better living opportunities there is slow growth in the Liberian Community. We

also understand that some of the Liberian Community members relocate to other States due to family issues. Additionally, we understand that others of the Community came to join us but later stopped coming to church. The Liberian Community continues to decline instead of growing. We see many of the Liberian Community members who are Methodist visiting other congregations around Bristol instead of joining us in worship at Bristol First Church.

After the review of those that visit us come and go, the role of our welcoming coordinator along with the secretary is to work very hard to continue to keep records and to visit our newcomers along with the Liberian ministry pastor. A decision was also made to keep the position of our visiting coordinator and the recording secretary active. They will submit a written report on the third Sunday of the month if they have anything to report. We also decided that a welcoming program will be held on the last Sunday of every month with a meal provided. The meal gathering must take place on a monthly basis after the second service, to encourage newcomers of the Liberian Community.

Bible Study

Week five of the gathering of the implementation focuses on a Bible study to continue to brainstorm the issue of how to encourage our newcomers and the present fifteen members of the Liberian Community. Our first day began with Acts chapter 2:43-47, 3: 1-26, 4:1-22 and 23-37. Week six continues with questions from our previous week's Bible study and continues with Acts 5:1-12, 5:12-26, 5:27-42. Our whole topic of the Bible study was: Life Among the Early Apostles. Weeks 6, 7 and 8 continues with the Acts of the Apostles, the chosen of Young Stephen and six others to assist with the

distribution of food among the increasing followers of Christ. Week 7 also continues with the study of chapter 7 on the wisdom speech of Stephen to the Council and his stoning. We studied how he was brave and full of the Holy Spirit to address the council of the Jewish and the religious leaders who did not understand the whole ministry of Jesus and his followers.

Our last week of Bible study focuses on chapter 8, Saul persecuting the Church, Philip preaching in Samaria and his ministry with the Ethiopian Eunuch on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. It has been, and it is a wonderful time of studies, and we will continue our gathering for Bible studies in addition to the church's regular adult Sunday School. The goal of this project is further extended so that many individuals within the church context will offer help, support and assist the minority Liberian Community that has experienced a disconnection within and outside of the church. We are encouraging the Liberian Community to be connected to their mother church, The United Methodist Church in Bristol Pennsylvania.

Educational/Ministry Journey

The beginning of my education is a sad but encouraging story due to my poor family history. I was eleven years of age before I had the opportunity to start school. My parents were farmers. Neither parent was educated, and I grew up living in the village of Banamah in rural Liberia with my two brothers and one sister. In 1968, my mother, the late Gborlormeh Dolo, requested that my father send me to school or else she was going to take him to court. At that time, my mother was living with her father in his hometown called Dementa near Gbarnga in Liberia. Being that the school year was almost gone,

around October 1968, my father, the late Gorpu Dolo Yangolo, then took me to my mother near the city of Gbarnga. There was no school in the village of Banamah. On March 1, 1969 my uncle, Rev. Johnson Yarkpawolo, took me for registration at the N.V. Massaquoi Elementary School in Gbarnga and this was my first day of school. My elementary school years were great from 1969 through 1975. Upon completion of grade six, at the beginning of the 1977 school year, I left from Gbarnga to Monrovia the capital city of Liberia to continue my junior high school.

Through GOD's blessing, I completed my junior high school at the end of 1977. At the beginning of the 1978 school year, I was able to enter the Monrovia Central High School where I completed my high school in 1981. After my high school graduation, I was not focusing on ministry to going to seminary right away. I did some secular jobs to support my family, but my mother was always wanting me to return to our district to be recommended to go to seminary. In 1990 due to the civil war, I returned with my family, my wife and children to Gbarnga. In 1991, I was appointed by the Rev. John B. Karpee as a Lay-speaker to serve the Dementa United Methodist Church. I served as a Lay-speaker at this preaching point until 1994. My next appointment was to serve as a pastor over three preaching points, Dement, Kolleh-ta, and Jaimue United Methodist Churches. I served these churches successfully from 1994 until 1996 before I was recommended to go to seminary. I was also serving my district, Kokovah as Secretary for the United Methodist Men's Fellowship.

Entering seminary for my Bachelor of Science in theology at the Gbarnga School of Theology in Monrovia, Liberia in September of 1996 was the beginning of my ministry journey. After two years of studies, I had 67 credit hours. But the civil war in

Liberia continued to be serious from December 1998 through the middle of 1999. We did not return to classes due to the war until October 1999. At that time, I had the opportunity to come to the United States on an Immigrant Visa. Through the blessing of the Almighty GOD, my name was selected randomly among thousands of applicants from the diversity lottery program or (DV). When I came to United States, I was anxious to continue my study in ministry. There was no seminary at the time for me to continue my undergraduate studied in theology in the United States.

In January 2001, I entered Cairn University at that time it was called Philadelphia College of Bible. I transferred my sixty-seven credit hours from the Gbarnga School of Theology to Cairn University to complete my undergraduate studies. After two years of studies, I completed my undergraduate studies and graduated in December 2002.

Worshipping at the Morrisville United Methodist Church at the time, I was thinking of where to continue my ministry study on the master level. I was then referred to United Theological Seminary by my senior pastor Reverend Dr. Frank H. Sanders. He continued to encourage me that United would be the best place for me because he is a graduate of United. He believed that the diversity would be a wonderful place for me.

In September 2004, I enrolled in United Theological Seminary for my Master of Divinity program. God is God and through God's blessing, I completed my Master of Divinity degree and graduated on May 24, 2008. Completing my Master of Divinity at that time I was told to go to Bristol First Church. I was affiliating with the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference through Morrisville United Methodist Church, so I was excited to be sent by the District Superintendent. On July 1, 2008 I went to Bristol First Church to assist the senior pastor and as pastor of the Liberian/African Ministry.

Since July 2008 to this time, I have served the Liberian Community as their pastor, assisting the senior pastor and serving as head of the Evangelism and outreach ministry. All along, I am applying to the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference to be considered for a pastoral appointment. Up to the time of this project, I have not received an appointment. In all my services to First Church, I am not paid, nor I do not receive any allowances or stipend for all my assisting at First United Methodist Church of Bristol. Back in January 2015, I decided to return to United Theological Seminary to do my Doctor of Ministry program. I praise God because due to the many obstacles including finances, I took semesters off and I am at this time in Semester six of the DMin program. Since October of 1999 through April 2019, I have been in the United States for more than nineteen years. For other ministries opportunities, I am ordained as an Elder in full connection in The United Methodist Church. I am married to my beautiful wife, Mrs. Tammay Q. Dolo, we have grown sons and daughters and we been married thirty-eight years.

The last of my recommendation is that upon completion of my DMin study, I must take my project to any bishop or conference that might welcome my ministry interest. I must surely implement or continue my interest of assimilating the Liberian Community into any conference that is willing to welcome and accept assimilation. I might be paid or receive a monthly stipend or allowance for such a ministry.

For the past ten years to July 1, 2018, I was not paid for any of my services at FUMC of Bristol. Although I was not paid the Lord was with me throughout my journey. God directed me to committed people who could help and encourage me to continue my ministry calling. For this I am most grateful to God.

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